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SERMONS

BY THE

REV. W. MORLEY PUNSHON, LL.D.

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PREFACE.

THE following selection from the sermons of Dr. Punshon has not been made on the principle of presenting any connected series of topics, but on that of giving a fair view of his ministry, in its ordinary exercise, and of the unrestrained variety by which it was marked. Those upon both sides of the Atlantic who listened to him while he was yet amongst us, will be reminded by these printed discourses of moments which they spent while passages found here were rolled forth with all the unrivalled force of his own delivery. Even now, when that delivery is wanting, impressions will be made which will sometimes be the revival of the old ones, and sometimes will be entirely new; and perhaps these impressions received from the printed page will often be not less profitable than were those received from the pulpit.

To those who never heard Dr. Punshon, his printed sermons will convey as good an idea of what his preaching was, as is generally the case with ministers in whom were combined a striking individuality of style with a rare ascendancy of manner. Print cannot bring back again the orator, cannot make us thrill under his touch with the twofold sympathy of response

to his own feeling and response to the feeling of a dense throng moved to the core. But print will enable multitudes who never formed part of Punshon's congregations to realize what must have been the effect of such appeals, when slung forth by such a slinger, among compact thousands in a state of high preparation.

I am persuaded that, many as are the sons in the gospel left behind him by Dr. Punshon, their number will be increased by the circulation of these discourses. May the perusal of them be the means of raising up some men not less mighty than he was, some even mightier, to carry on that work in which he bore the part of a master builder.

WM. ARTHUR.

l. ., *January* 2, 1882.

CONTENTS.

I.

ANDREW, THE LORD'S FIRST CONVERT.

PAGE

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."—JOHN i. 40–42. 1

II.

THE LORD'S ELECT SERVANT.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law."—ISA. xlii. 1–4. 18

III.

SAUL, THE GOD-DESERTED MAN.

"And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."—1 SAM. xxviii. 15. . . 35

IV.

BACKSLIDING.

PAGE

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."—REV. ii., part of ver. 5. . . . 51

V.

THE BELIEVER'S SONSHIP.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—1 JOHN iii. 2, 3. 66

VI.

THE EMPTY SEPULCHRE.

"And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."—LUKE xxiv. 5, 6. . . 84

VII.

THE SANCTUARY.

"I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."—PS. xlii. 4. 101

VIII.

THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL.

"Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."—Ps. liii. 6. 118

IX.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—I.

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

PAGE

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."—LUKE xv. 11-16. 136

X.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—II.

A MIND'S TRANSITION.

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father."—LUKE xv. 17-20. 153

XI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—III.

THE JOY OF RETURN.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."—LUKE xv. 20-24. 170

XII.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—IV.

THE DISSENTIENT TO THE COMMON JOY.

PAGE

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."—LUKE xv. 25-32. 187

XIII.

SIN AND MERCY.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."—ISA. xliv. 22. 205

XIV.

STRENGTH AND PEACE.

"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."—PS. xxix. 11. 219

XV.

CHRIST OUR ADVOCATE.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins."—1 JOHN ii. 1, 2. 236

XVI.

DECEIVED SOWERS TO THE FLESH.

PAGE

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."—GAL. vi. 7–9. 253

XVII.

MOUNT MORIAH.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."—HEB. xi. 17, 18. 270

XVIII.

THE HOLY GHOST AND POWER.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me."—ACTS i. 8. . 287

XIX.

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—ACTS vii. 59, 60. . 303

XX.

THE FAITHFUL MINISTER.

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."—ACTS xx. 24. . . 321

I.

ANDREW, THE LORD'S FIRST CONVERT.

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."—JOHN i. 40–42.

HERE we are introduced to the first New Testament brothers, and if you have been instructed by Abel in the nature of acceptable sacrifice, and warned by Esau against the sin and danger of abusing privilege, you will not refuse to listen, when these true-hearted fishermen teach you—the one the Saviour's first convert, the other his earliest apostle. Scorn not these simple teachers! Swarthy they are, and sunburnt with exposure and toil, and they speak in uncultured phrase, and are guiltless of the learning of the schools; but theirs is a higher wisdom than that of the Porch or the Academy; at the feet of Jesus they have reverently learnt it, and in loving speech will they declare it in our ears. They would fain, those earnest disciples, do with us all as Andrew in the young zeal of attachment did for his own brother Simon—they would fain bring us to Jesus. To enter thoroughly into the spirit of the words we have read, you must remind yourselves of the circumstances, both

attendant and preceding. The whole land was prepared for the coming of the promised Messiah. The people, unwillingly subject to the Roman power, longed for restored nationality and political freedom. Students of the Scriptures, devout waiters upon God, who did his will, and rested on his word, knew that the prophecies neared their periods of appointed fulfilment, and could trace in the sweep of external events, and in the heart-throbs that were almost audible, the foretokens of the Deliverer's coming. A strange and solitary man, with the hues of the wilderness upon him, with an austere sanctity, and with a soul of power, preached in the desert and by the banks of the Jordan "the baptism of repentance and remission of sins." The multitudes heard and trembled; and the city, moved to its heart, sent messengers to the new Prophet, asking, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" But his was a precursory office, and faithfully were its obligations fulfilled: "'I am not that Light; I am sent to bear witness of that Light.' I am not the Conqueror; I only run before his chariot and prepare his way. Go, tell them that sent you, I am but a Messenger, as ye are—'the Messenger before his face'—and the mightier than I cometh, whose shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose." Announcements like these, frankly and frequently spoken, only increased the popular restlessness, and caused the thoughtful to ponder these things in their hearts.

And now, coming not with the sweep of the meteor, but with the quiet of the sunrise, there stood on the banks of the Jordan, in the vigour of his Divine manhood, God's incarnate Son. His

youth has been spent in retirement, his human consciousness has gradually developed; at the feet of the doctors he has increased in wisdom, and, as one says, "by his Divine-human simplicity has confounded the Masters in Israel;" and in his exhibitions of purest and loveliest humanity, there gathers round him "the favour both of God and man." In silence, corresponding to the unostentatiousness of all the adjuncts of the Saviour, was the work of preparation done. In retirement he receives his mental fitness for his ministry. In retirement he is baptized into consecration by his reluctant forerunner. In retirement he wrestles with the arch-enemy, and tramples upon the same order of Temptation which had been victorious before. And now, panting to enter upon his sacred work, with the seal of its baptism upon him, and with that inner consciousness of perfect qualification which has already approved itself in the desert-struggle, there he stands, the Lamb of God, the Lord of attendant angels, the unequalled Teacher of the multitudes, the accepted offering for the world. The Master is waiting for the testimony—the Messenger is ready to give it—the world's ear bends to listen: why should there be longer delay? "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This first testimony falls upon wondering ears—upon ears that can hardly comprehend it—and we may imagine the small group of listeners agitated with emotions as with waves, coursing through their hearts in ceaseless ebb and flow—reverence, marvel, hesitation, doubt, surprise.

"Again the next day after John stood, and two of

his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" The witness, having once broken silence, neither falters nor ceases in his testimony; and at this repetition of it there flashes upon the minds of the hearers, already thoughtful and prepared, the fulness of its life-giving meaning. "The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." Our hearts go with those first Gospel seekers. We fancy their feelings as they press upon the track of the Master who "must increase," and whom they have been already taught to love. The keen inquiry, the wishful tenderness, the reverent anticipation, the silence which the spirit's deep solicitude constrains, "even as strong winds hold swollen clouds from raining"—we understand them, we *feel* them all. "Then Jesus turned." Ah! when did he ever refuse to turn when a contrite sinner followed? and with a loving glance and with affectionate words, for they were the first whom his Father had given him, he said, "What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou?" Here is their acknowledgment of discipleship, their voluntary enrolment in the school of the Redeemer. "And they came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day." Into the sacred intercourses of that day of sojourn the Evangelists do not enter; but we know that there attachment ripened into tenderness, and prepossession fastened into certainty, and the troubled hope became a strong assurance; and that, in the satisfaction of a newly-kindled faith, and in the warmth of a newly-awakened fervour, Andrew became at once witness and evangelist, and hastening, with

rapture in his heart and on his tongue, "he first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."

And this Andrew—the open-hearted, the believing, the benevolent—should he not be the true type of Christian brotherhood now? Can any finer pattern, other than the All-holy One, be set before the seeker of salvation now? He is brought before us in a threefold aspect, as—

I. *The earnest Inquirer.*
II. *The satisfied Believer.*
III. *The earnest Missionary.*

I. There is everything in the conduct of Andrew which we should expect to meet with in a sincere seeker of salvation. His mind had evidently undergone a course of thoughtful training. First roused, perhaps, from a state of carnal indifference by the preaching of the Baptist—becoming a diligent student of the Scriptures—meditating upon their wondrous meanings, as he watched the stars which gleamed nightly over Bethsaida, or oared the quiet waters of the Sea of Galilee—he entered largely into the general expectation of his countrymen, and was prepared to respond eagerly to any summons which should call him to "behold the Lamb." Hence, when the summons came, he conferred not with flesh and blood, he postponed not to some more convenient season, he allowed himself to be hindered by no false shame nor proud reserve, he suffered no inferior duty to hinder him in the discharge of the highest, but followed out the

heavenly inspiration within him, and was rewarded by arriving at the grandest conviction of his life. He comes down, brethren, through the lapse of years as a representative man, a model for our imitation and study. There is an open-hearted and decisive earnestness about him, which we shall do well to reproduce in ourselves. He is a remarkable example of the power of principle over prejudice, and how a man may be so filled with an absorbing and holy desire, that he can obtain the mastery over hindering circumstance and cherished prepossession. It is impossible not to suppose that in his meditations upon the coming Messiah, some ideal embodiment of his own notions of perfection would have presented itself before his mind. It is hardly to be imagined, moreover, that he could altogether divest his conceptions of those attributes of earthly pomp and grandeur, in which Jewish hope had clothed its expectations of the coming Deliverer. With the vision of a King before him of regal bearing and unearthly beauty, and perhaps attended by a numerous and servile retinue, he is introduced suddenly to a solitary man, walking unattended on the banks of the Jordan—majestic indeed, but his majesty the majesty of sorrow, distinguished by no external comeliness, with no accessories of rank or wealth—and he is challenged to see in him the hope of the nation's heart and the burden of the prophet's song. With all his preconceived ideas thus rudely and in a moment overturned, how acts the young inquirer? Some, in the hasty revulsion, might have turned away with disdain, and many would have surrendered themselves to carnal reasonings, and to a prejudice which would have been invincible for

years. But Andrew had the principle of Faith—faith in God the promiser, faith in the authenticity of Scripture, faith in an inner monarchy which could shine through sordid raiment, faith in the sincere and strong Forerunner, faith in the assurance that his own spirit, earnest and truth-loving, would be guarded from the wiles of imposture—and his Faith mastered his prejudice, and curbed his disappointment, and his passion, and his pride, as the skilful charioteer curbs the swift coursers to his will, and urged forward the prosecution of the all-important inquiry.

Brethren, if we would seek Jesus, we must come with open hearts, trampling upon our pride as we tread the "way somewhat ascending" which leads us to the sacrificial hill. You have heard of the Messiah perhaps, and have been indolently seeking him: is it because of prejudice, not yet rooted out, that you have failed to find him? You too, perhaps, would fain have rendered your homage to him at the foot of an earthly throne. There is something which bewilders you in his low estate and mean apparel. Your faith would rely only in the sight of legions of angels and a proclamation of universal empire; or you bring all the tidings of Revelation to the standard of your scanty Reason, and, making it a sort of Procrustes' bed, you stretch this Truth because it is not wide enough for your latitudinarian sympathies, and shorten the other because its stature is above the clouds. Or you are shocked by the shadow of a mystery lurking in things Divine, and while mystery is one of the inseparable conditions of existence and of the commonest things—a child could ask questions which a sage would despair to answer—you

imagine that God should reveal himself cloudlessly upon your dazzled sight, and that your erring humanity could stand unblenched before the full-orbed vision of the Holy One. Or you examine into the conditions of salvation and recoil from them, as you find that from the beginning to the end there is no allowance for human infirmity, no compromise with darling sin, not a particle of aliment upon which your pride can feed, no room for your own meritorious doings, and that through all time, and even in eternity, you are never to be accounted worthier, but that your only experience is to be "saved by grace," and your unfailing harp-song is to be, "Worthy the Lamb."

Ah! no wonder, if you cherish prepossessions like these, like so many "veils of flesh" darkening your prospect of the Saviour, that you have never found him. You must come with open hearts, as Andrew came—with hearts, like Memnon's harp, sensitive to the slightest heavenly ray, and eager to understand, and to do, the Saviour's perfect will; you must come prepared to venture all, if need be, that your life holds dear, in sacrifice, if only there may dawn upon you the grand, inspiring, critical discovery, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." We must imitate this first convert of the Saviour, not only in our freedom from prejudice, but in the indomitable earnestness, which, once on the track of the inquiry, resolutely pursues it to the end. The desire of his heart, once roused, falters not, but presses steadily towards the attainment of its object. He follows; he is not discouraged by the apparently repelling question —repelling in any one but the Redeemer—"What

seek ye?" By the address of "Rabbi" he at once puts himself under the stranger's teaching, and by his further question he expresses his desire to learn, in the quiet seclusion of his dwelling, all that he would have him to do. And thus earnestly must we all "strive" after the knowledge and the fellowship of Jesus. The desire feebly aroused, the question languidly asked, the ardour which the first repulse abates and which one blast of scorn destroys, the calculating religiousness which is always on its guard lest it should be "righteous overmuch," that nice adjustment of comparative energy which puts Religion into icy proprieties, but rushes with fearless enthusiasm into the chase of fame or gold—all these are fatal hindrances to the finding of the Lord Jesus. "He is the rewarder of those who *diligently* seek him." The seeker stands frightened and shivering before the "strait gate," while the *striver* presses in. Put your soul into your search, and you will find the Saviour. Surely if for the perishable present your desires are passionate and your purpose strong, much more for the abiding future should you wrestle with earnestness and power. Oh, if but you could see that future as it is—if but for one short hour you could wend into eternity your pilgrim-way—if you could pierce the fathomless obscure, listen with ears not dulled to the rapturous harmonies of heaven, or hearken shudderingly as voices of wild wailing essay to tell the dark secrets of their prison-house—if, on your earthward return, you could meet on the threshold *your own nature* entering in, some real specimen of glorified or doomed humanity—how would all the tumults of the present be dwarfed into insignificance

before you! Commerce would lose its interest, pleasure its fascination, letters their classic charm, and even home much of its sweet alluring sorcery, and your whole soul would be penetrated with the pressure of one consuming desire to "save a soul from death."

Brethren, Eternity is not less real, because you cannot make that pilgrimage. The other world is as solemn, as certain, as near, as if there flashed across our path its alternate gleams of sunshine and forks of flame. Oh, to live as if we felt its influence and breathed its air! Oh, to realize always its nearing destinies, and its ever-present, ever-watching, ever-helpful God! Brethren, no difficulties can prevent our access to Jesus, if we seek him with all our heart. If the proud waters separate us, he will walk upon the billow's crest. If the doors are barred, and the walls of granite masonry, through them all we shall hear his love-whisper breathing, "Peace be unto you!" If we stand pensively gazing into another's tomb, we shall find him by our side suddenly, glancing at us with loving eyes, and giving us at once conviction and reassurance by the simple mention of our name. If the tomb has opened for ourselves, and in our hardihood of four days' death we are deemed putrescent and forsaken, his voice, echoing through the drear aisles of the far-caverned sepulchre, shall issue its "Come forth," and we shall live.

II. Andrew is presented to us as the satisfied believer, exulting in the consciousness of the discovered Messiah. His earnestness and faith have been honoured. His restlessness has ceased. And he

blushes in the beauty of a new hope, and in the tenderness of a new attachment to the whole world's Redeemer. There are two things which are noticeable here—the open-heartedness and the satisfactoriness of Christianity. The invitation of the forerunner was to *behold* the Lamb of God. The Saviour repeats it from his own lips: "Come and see." And this is consonant with the whole genius of the Gospel. Christianity requires no disguises. The faith which she demands is not a blind credulity, but an intelligent reliance. She asks not trust without evidence, but trust in evidence—sufficient, authenticated, brought down to the level of the senses, and yet leaving room for the highest confidences of heroic faith. This is an essential difference between the false and the true in religion. All the systems of ancient mythology and of modern superstition have their reserve and their mysteriousness. Alike at Delphi and Dodona, at Mecca and at Rome, there are secrets for the initiated—responses sounding through a hollow cave, or from behind a curtaining veil — all opinions regulated by a supreme will, all knowledge kept by a custodian priest, and doled out at his pleasure to the submissive people of his charge. The appeal is to the senses rather than to the conscience—veiled prophets, and Pythian madness, and flashing scimitars in the olden times, and attendant acolytes, and fragrant cedar wood, and gorgeous vestments in the times that are—these are the arguments that are to captivate the fancy and allure the faith. Alas! for the shrivelled thing, that must be draped in kingly garments for men to know it as a King. It is wax-work, not Life. But

Christianity has no lack of inherent grandeur, and therefore needs not borrow. She has no muttering wizards, that peep in the pauses of their necromancy from out the holy shrine. She deals not in "deceivableness of unrighteousness, nor lying wonders." She seeks not, by ceremonies of terror, to cause the timid to crouch before her altars, nor by idle pageants to dazzle the sensuous into devotees. She announces, in simple language, the sublimest Truth. She presents, for the investigation alike of the simple and of the scholarly, her cumulative and various evidence. She suggests the highest motive, and inspires the highest hope. She grasps the deepest instincts, that she may satisfy them, and unfolds the grandest destiny for the future both of humanity and of the individual man; and, standing in the majesty of her Truth, she says to all men, "Come and see." Rest not upon Tradition—here is Truth. Be not satisfied with the husks of the prodigal's fare—here is bread from heaven, the dainty and outspread banquet of the Father's house. Carry your trouble no longer, ye whom it has heavily laden—here is deliverance. Toil not so wearily, ye hapless ones—here is Rest. This is the message of Christianity to you all. She invites your scrutiny and your allegiance. Jesus stands in the way of all hearts that inquire, turns to meet any eager footstep which follows him; and whether the inquirer be a king in his purple, or a beggar in his rags, a sage of many-wintered years, or childhood with its "prayer-clasped hands," he greets them with the welcome of his grace. "Come and see," thou wondering Nathanael, hardly looking for a Messiah out of Nazareth; thou favoured

one, in Patmos privileged with visions of the afterwards, "Come and see." Behold me, that it is I myself—I, the Pierced One, who can therefore heal thy smart of trouble—I, the Weary and Sorrowful, who can charm thy unrest away—I, the Teacher of the heavenly, that thy unbelief may vanish at my presence—I, the Divine Saviour, that I may lift thee to everlasting life.

Thus frank in its invitations, Christianity is, in like manner, satisfactory in the experiences to which it conducts its children. The inquiry, sincerely prosecuted, never fails of its result of blessing. God has never said to the seed of Jacob, nor to the seed of Adam, "Seek ye my face" in vain. The heart turned diligently heavenward, the desire panting after God, as the hunted hart after the water-brook, or the wounded deer to the brake, or the caravan in the desert to the grove of palms, cannot—God's word hath spoken it—be suffered to end in disappointment and in sorrow. Men "*shall* know, if they follow on to know, the Lord." There is a certainty in this, greater than attends the search after any earthly knowledge. Long and wearily may men toil after hidden lore, pressing even through the midnight of doubt to the morning of discovery, but in most cases there can be but a vague conviction of attainment; in nothing but in the purer mathematics can there be anything like demonstration, and even in them the results are bare and passionless and cold. But in the search for Jesus there is an emotional, as well as an intellectual, satisfaction. When Christ is found, it becomes a question of consciousness. The change is warmly felt as well

as intelligently realized. Through the darkness the seeker presses into the light, but the light is not the chill beam of the lunar rainbow, but the warm rays of a perpetual summer; not only does the mind rest in satisfaction, but the eye sparkles and the heart throbs with happiness. It is at once Life's grandest discovery, and Life's chiefest joy: "We have found the Messias." What finding in the world is there like that! There was joy in the soul of the geometrician of Syracuse, when his Eureka of delight rang upon the ears of the citizens, who deemed him mad. There was joy in the soul of Newton, when the theory of gravitation burst upon his wondering view. There was joy in the spirit of Columbus, in the moment of his serene triumph over doubt and mutiny, when the land-birds settled upon the shrouds of his vessel, bearing upon their tiny wings the welcomes of a new world. There is joy for the gold-finder, when the rich ore glitters in his cradle; for the wanderer, when his wistful eye first glimpses his childhood's home; for the child, when he has just been let into one of Nature's mysteries, and clasps his hands for very delight and wonder; for the poet, when he sends a great thought ringing its glad way through the world, and stirring the souls of men. But what are all these, even in their highest raptures, to the joy of that moment when the glad disciples can grasp a brother's hand, and announce to him, "We have found the Messias!" Then all doubt ceases, and all fear is banished from the spirit, and dark condemnation lifts its shadow from the man, and sweet peace nestles in, and holy love thrones herself in the new heart; and the smile of Jesus burns the

passion and the pride away, and forgiveness speaks in his voice, and the ecstasy of reconciliation, pulsing through the depths of the soul, makes all Creation beautiful—the air vocal with new and sweeter melodies, and a richer lustre to shine from out the cloudless azure of the opening and opened heaven. Brethren, is this satisfaction yours? Some of you remember its first thrill, the moment when it first ran in the joyous courses of your soul. Some of you are panting to realize it, and Jesus beckons you to abide with him that you may find the blessing there.

III. Having earnestly sought, and happily found, the Messiah, Andrew follows out the first instinct of the regenerate soul, by a proclamation of his discovery, and by an invitation to others to share it. Eager to communicate the glad tidings, he seeks out the companion of his infancy, the partner of his daily toil, "his own brother Simon"—"and he brought him to Jesus." His charity centred in his home, and then radiated its influences around. For some months after this first satisfying interview, the brothers seem still to have followed their fishermen's calling—not elated by the rare privilege which they had enjoyed, perhaps not expecting to be honoured of the Master any further—until in the pious discharge of daily duty the call to the apostleship sounded over the breast of Gennesaret, "and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." We a while ago reminded you of the striking difference between the Old Testament and the New in this matter—that of the first brothers mentioned in the one, the elder slew the younger;

that of the first brothers mentioned in the other, the elder brought the younger to Jesus. And such is but a type of the difference between the dispensations in which the men respectively lived. The one was a Leviticus, the other is an Evangel; the one was of rigour, the other of love; the one proclaims the law for a people, the other the charter for a world. The one, given with palpable manifestations of its Divinity, presents us with austere and inimitable types of men; the other, not less Divine, has greater humanness, appeals more directly to our common sympathies, to the grief and gladness which make up the history of every day. In fine, the one, while not excluding the merciful, tells mainly of Duty and of Judgment; the other, while affecting and earnest in its warnings, is yet the Gospel of Jesus Christ: "And he brought him to Jesus."

Here is Christianity in action, the benevolent embodiment of our religion, the necessary philanthropy which would fain enrich others with the treasure which itself has recently received. Brethren, this is the world's necessity, the one blessing for which its mighty heart is yearning—to be brought to Jesus. Its restless upheavals, all the lava-tides of passionate emotion which roll down the sides of its national Etnas, are but the expressions of this insatiable longing. As in the aggregate, so in the individual. Each man, to be happy, must be brought to Jesus; each family, to be as it should be, a home-type of the "whole family in heaven and earth," must be a Bethany, hallowed by the visits and blessed with the love of Jesus. And this mission may be the rarest privilege, as it is the unquestionable duty, of those of you who have your-

selves believed—to bring men to Jesus. Look about upon your families—are there none in the home-circle, none of the eyes that shine and glisten when they meet your own, that have not yet learned to sparkle at the Saviour? Are there none to whom your voice is music, who delight not in the sound of his name? Thy wife, O loving husband—thy child, O affectionate parent—are they Christ's? You have influence over them in persuasion, and by your own union with Christ you have influence over God in prayer. Oh, bring this blended influence to bear, first at home, and then upon all whom your feet can reach, or your loosened tongue win by its eloquence for God. Brethren, I summon you to this work of evangelism to-day. Yours may be a greater victory than ever human conqueror won. The laurel wreath that girds the brow of heroes may wither before the perpetual verdure of your amaranthine crown. It is much to succour the body, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," to go boldly into the fever-homes upon a work of healing and of mercy; but to do as you may do—to minister with even-handed benefit both to body and soul, to snatch immortal spirits from the very grasp of the destroyer, to bring the foul and frenzied demoniac to Jesus, that he may sit at his feet a clothed and happy *man*—this is a work which might even make angels envy you, for which Jesus will greet you with his very heartiest welcome, for which God will endow you with pleasures for evermore.

II.

THE LORD'S ELECT SERVANT.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law."—ISA. xlii. 1-4.

WE find it easier, in human affairs, to discover a fault than to suggest a remedy. We complain without an effort—it is *too* natural to us to blame or to repine; it requires thought, time, sacrifice, to redeem or to amend. It is not so with the Scripture, which is the word of God. There, each word of rebuke is a means to an end. There is no exposure of evil to exhibit the censor's superiority, there is no delight in the merciless anatomy of sin. There is no mockery of distress by the presentation of sorrow that is hopeless, or leprosy beyond cure. Equal to the need, and surpassing it, present as soon as the need is felt and acknowledged, there is the redemption. To illustrate this thought, you have only to look at the verses immediately before the text. They give us God's view of the world's need, the absence of wisdom and manli-

ness inevitably resulting from idolatry, the folly of character, the failure of plan, the chaos of thought, the utter and hopeless abandonment of a world without a God (Isa. xli. 28, 29). Now, so soon as you have realized this necessity, while the heart is yet paining under the sadness which the thought of it has created, the bright light is in the clouds, and in the midst the vision of the Redeemer—"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." It does not need that I should enter into argument as to the reference of this passage to Christ and his great work in the world. We feel instinctively that the words could refer to no other, and it strikes upon us as a matter of course that they should be quoted by St. Matthew in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel, and expressly applied to Jesus. Without misgiving or controversy, we may enter upon our meditation, suffering our thoughts to flow around this central figure, and seeking to discern its beauty, while we consider—

I. *The need of the world.*
II. *The designation of its Deliverer.*
III. *The manner and issue of his work.*

I. The need of the world is affirmed in this passage

to be the bringing forth or establishment of God's "judgment." The word has many senses in the Scripture, but there are three to which we may especially refer you. In Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20, it is thus written: "He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them." Here the term is used of the precepts of God's law, that direct and unquestionable revelation which he has given of his word and will. In Isa. i. 17 you find it: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow"—and similarly in Luke xi. 42: "Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God." Here it evidently stands for righteousness—essential rightness, that which is just and true, alike towards man and God, the high moral excellence which is the ideal of character, and which the weary world has almost broken its heart in fruitless endeavours to attain. Then in Ps. cxix. 20, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times"—and in the quotation of the text in Matthew's Gospel, it would seem to have reference to the dispensation of grace, the "power of God unto salvation," the provision of might and mastery for human feebleness and struggle. Now, if you think of these meanings for a moment, you will discover, couched in them, the world's strongest necessities to-day.

Take the first thought. It is needful surely that that there should be a bringing forth of "judgment"

as *a revelation of God's word and will.* Who that looks abroad upon the world but must mourn over the bewilderment and confusion of its inhabitants in relation to the things of God. Where there is no revelation there is obscure or distorted vision, and the people perish. If it were possible to conceive of a world without a Bible, and consequently without a standard of authority; in the spectacle of wayward and active mind, with no restraint upon its folly or frenzy, there would need no darker conception of hell. Who that looks into his own heart, and frets himself with the many problems of existence which the human hath no skill to solve, can forbear the longing for a higher wisdom, for a voice which can always make itself heard, and which, when heard, can silence the babble of strange tongues, and in imperial tones proclaim to us the true? In matters of lower moment, we would often flee from the restlessness of licence to the tyranny of some strong thinker's power. The mind longs for rest, when chafed by its endless doubts as the wave upon the rough strand, and from its tumult and passion the yearning has been often breathed, "Oh for the light of the Divine!"

This yearning is answered when the judgments of the Lord, "true and righteous altogether," are revealed unto men. The nature need no longer pine, nor wander aimlessly among the speculations of the ages. The feebleness is assured by the nearness of a directing hand, and the pride is humbled by the authority of an unchallengeable law. God hath spoken, and every cavil must be silenced, and every question may be answered in his words. Once convinced that the

voice is God's voice, we have no choice but to obey. When he speaks, it is not an opinion, it is a fiat. He does not reason—he pronounces, enacts, declares; and the hushed world should listen and be still. The want of the intellect, bowed beneath the sense of its own ignorance, and yet keenly avaricious of knowledge, is met in the Divine law. That law shows man in his dependence, in his fall, in his mysterious possession of a life from which he cannot rid himself, and in the destiny which fills the future of his being. That law shows God in his character, in his relationships, in the magnificence of his enthronement, in the bend and stoop of his mercy towards those who have offended him, in the precept which enjoins obedience, and in the promise which gives the strength to render it. That law brings these revelations of man and God together—discloses, in simultaneous discovery, the need and the remedy—and makes it possible for every man to flee from his trouble to his Redeemer, and to find the rest and happiness of being in the knowledge of the "only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent."

If you take the next meaning of the word "judgment"—*essential rightness*—none will deny that in this also a great want of the nature is supplied. The nobility of the Eden inheritance, by which the powers of the soul were in accord with each other, with the external world, and with God, how sadly has it been tarnished by the fall! The original derangement, how thoroughly has it infused itself into every part of the universe, and into every faculty of the man! To a thoughtful mind there is nothing more melancholy than the alternate alienation and longing of the mind

towards the holy and the pure. It has been well said, "Man can neither renounce his sins nor his God" (Vinet). He flies from the Deity he worships; he is a slave to the sins that he condemns. There are contradictions in his nature which he cannot reconcile, a war in his soul deadlier than of the tented field. He has longings after purity, but they are stifled by his habits of evil, and have seldom vent—as a jewel might flash for a moment from some foul refuse-heap of a city, only to excite the stranger's covetousness, or his wonder how it had got there. Hence it is that man's religious history is so eccentric and unsatisfactory. He cannot acquiesce in evil, but he is fitful and languid in his endeavours to be good; and until Divine grace has wrought mightily upon his heart, he is by turns attracted and repelled from godliness—rapid as the comet in the heavens in his aversion and approach to the sun. His master-want is holiness, but how to reach it he finds not. His heart, convulsed with tumultuous passions; the nations, groaning under the cupidity of the selfish, and the insolence of the tyrant's wrong; the world, prostrate in a moral decrepitude, and forced by its religions into still fouler impurity—all long for the establishment of the right. "They look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish." There is no light, no hope. Through the long darkness the eyes strain upward for the glimpse of the day; the people linger, trembling until the tables are given; "the isles wait for the law;" the universal conscience cries out for its coming; and for lack of it "the whole creation travaileth together until now."

Consequent upon these two wants of the nature —"judgment" as a revelation of law, and "judgment" as a habit of righteousness—there is created the third "judgment," as *a dispensation of power*, because ignorance and impurity are helpless and "without strength," until "in due time Christ" dies "for the ungodly." By unaided effort ignorance cannot acquire knowledge, nor pollution be cleansed from its stain. There must be a power by which the scales are shed from the eyes and the warp from the mind; by which the law becomes a life, and the soul is filled with its ecstasy, and enabled to discharge its obligations; by which the nature is rescued from its inherited feebleness, and made "valiant for the truth upon the earth." Without the revelation of this power, all other would be an aggravation of the torture, as the sunlight on the shroud seems but a gay mockery of the death it robes. The bringing forth of judgment, which is declared to be "to open the blind eyes," is declared also to be "to bring out the prisoners from the prison;" and the effect of the Saviour's mediatorial work is described as the judgment of this world, and the casting out of its prince from his usurped dominion. As the special anointing for the great work of deliverance, God says of Christ, "I have put my *Spirit* upon him." That spirit is a Spirit of power. Where he works, there can be blindness and feebleness no longer: the lame shall leap as an hart, and the darkened eye revel in a new sense of beauty; the leper shall be as a child in comeliness, and the sepulchred shall be alive from the dead. Here, then, are the wants of the man and of the world met by the bringing forth of judgment from

the Lord. Longing soul, who art panting for heavenly knowledge! poor chained one, in the fetters of thy sin, paralyzed at the pool-side, hopeless upon the very brink of the Bethesda!—here are healing and comfort for thee. No conflict of opinion; here is rest for thy mind in the standard of unerring truth. No conflict of passion; here is rest for thy soul in the purity and justice of the throne. No conflict of fear and foreboding, and despair; here is rest for thy heart in the tenderness of "strength and peace." Truth, purity, happiness for all, from the bringing in of the judgment of the Lord. And not only are the wants of the individual, but of the world, comprised in this purpose of mercy. He who brings in the judgment is the harmonizer for whom the nations have waited—the royal Prince to whom is committed the arbitration of all things—the source and spring of the earth's unutterable peace. The world needs nothing, "save Jesus only." All its wants meet in the person of its Surety. Let him work to the completion of his purpose, and Aceldama must bloom into Paradise. All social wrongs will vanish, the monopoly and the oppression; the sources of poverty and the sources of quarrel will disappear from the earth, which they have cursed so long. All religious evils will be ended. Scepticism will not shake the faith, nor blasphemy curdle the blood; fanaticism will no longer be grafted upon the reasonable service of the gospel; men will rejoice in the white light of truth, and blush that they have been accustomed to obscure or distemper its rays; charity will be no longer a fugitive, housed by stealth in hearts warmer than their fellows, but her rejoicing

shall be in the habitable parts of the earth, and her spirit the inspiration of the kingdom "which cannot be moved"—for he shall reign whose right it is, and Christ shall be all in all.

Brethren, the world craves this day. Men have strong faith that it will come; they know that there is that in themselves, which can be made willing to receive it when it comes; and all the moaning which now swells out, like the thunder of the waves upon the shore, into a prayer hoarse with the burden of wrong and sorrow, will be turned into a psalm as he appears; for yet, as by the olden city of Nain, a word from his lips can turn a dirge into the anthem of a bridal.

II. There are certain particulars upon which it may be well briefly to dwell, as to the terms which are here applied to Jesus, the world's Deliverer, and which abundantly show the harmony of counsel in the Godhead touching the great work of man's rescue from ruin. We find, in the first place, that Christ is called "the Servant" of the Father. In at least three other places in this prophecy is this same term used. In Isa. lii. 13: "My servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." In Isa. liii. 11: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." Again in Isa. xlix. 6: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." It is evident from these passages, that our Lord is

called the servant of the Father in reference only to his mediatorial work. He is not essentially a servant. He "took upon him *the form* of a servant," and with glad heart and willing feet went forth to do a servant's work. There was confided to him a task which no other could accomplish; and to rebuild the dismantled temple of Jehovah, and to secure for him a higher revenue of honour, and to make possible for him his grandest attribute of forgiveness, and at the same time to uplift and save a world which had "destroyed itself" by sin—he laid his glory by.

Christ is called again the "Elect," or chosen of God, in whom his soul delighteth; or, as Matthew renders it, almost in the very words in which the Father attested the Son from heaven, "My beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased." If proof were wanting of his essential equality with the Father, and that he was "Emmanuel, God with us," we might surely find it here. Though in the form of a servant, he had the heart and the love of a son. He was chosen to this work because none other was trustworthy. The world would have remained in hopeless ignorance of God, unless "the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father," had himself "declared him" (John i. 18). He only could "perfect for ever, by one offering, them that are sanctified;" he only could be the world's "peace, making both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition between them." He was not only chosen to this work, but, oh! deeper mystery of tenderness, beloved on account of this work. Deep and everlasting as had been the love of the Father to the Son, it was intensified on account of this.

"*Therefore* doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep" (John x. 17); as if the redemption of sinners had struck a deeper chord, and evoked a more exquisite affection, than had arisen from the complacencies of a past eternity, or from the wisest and most skilful administration of the world.

To complete this harmony, we have to remind you that the Divine Servant, thus chosen and beloved, was the subject of especial anointing from the Spirit. To this the text refers: "I have put my Spirit upon him." Again, in Isa. xi. 1, 2: "There shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Again, on that remarkable occasion in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Saviour quotes the words of Isaiah (lxi. 1–3): "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;" and then startles his listeners by their decisive application to himself: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." We gather from these passages, that in unmeasured fulness the influences of the Spirit were shed upon Christ, to hallow and to counsel, to sustain and to make mighty, every act of his incarnate life. Although he knew no sin, and therefore needed no renewal, yet even his sinless human nature needed the anointing of the Spirit to enrich it with all suitable qualifications, and to make it strong for service or for suffering; for ever in its highest embodied possibility, human nature cannot do without God.

Now, take these three thoughts, and you have a sight that may well enkindle your most rapt and reverent wonder—the sight of the whole Deity at work for man. You see the Father, not stern and implacable, as some gloomy theories present him, but graciously willing the recovery of the lost, arranging the whole scheme of redemption, "according to his good pleasure which he had purposed in himself," and in unexampled tenderness offering, in costliest sacrifice, his only-begotten Son. You see the co-equal Spirit—content mediatorially to proceed from the Father and the Son—delighting in the gentler manifestations of his energy, shedding his bright baptisms upon Jesus without measure or grudging, stooping from his throne to woo the stubborn sinner to himself, descending like the dew of the morning into the heart of childhood, and of the blasphemer, the beggar, the felon, lifting up those who should be peers for angels, and of the household of God. You see the Divine Son, choosing to be humiliated, and despised, and smitten, entering into that mystery of sorrow which human intellect shudders only to conceive, refusing no labour nor sacrifice, but obedient alike in his loving ministry and in his atoning death, "delighting" in agony as men delight in home, knowing no pleasure so sweet as that of snatching brands from the burning, loving the humanity which he had wedded so well that he took it with him into heaven, in order that all other humanity might not feel strange and lonely in the sky, and watching in tireless solicitude and pleading in ceaseless advocacy for the earth he has ransomed.

Oh, nowhere in the universe is there to be seen a

sight like this! All the energies of Heaven engaged to save a sinner! Look on it, that your rebellion may be hushed, and your unbelief and indifference scattered at its presence. You may crouch and tremble before heathen gods, which only smite their worshippers. You may shrink, like the guilty things you are, when the Lord's pure presence surprises you in your forbidden delights. You may be awed, when Sinai shakes "beneath the dark pavilion spread of legislative God." You may be bewildered into fear as you dwell upon each grandeur and marvel of creative power. You may sink into your own nothingness before that insufferable purity, to which the heavens are not clean. But the vision which has been shown to you to-day should awaken other feelings than these. God asks and claims your love. He is not satisfied with distant reverence, and cold obedience and faultless service. He wants regard, and trust, and clinging. He cares not for the courtier's knee, he longs for the child's *heart;* and he has revealed himself in the mysterious unity of the Trinity thus tenderly, that—

> "The mild glories of his grace
> Your softer soul may move;
> Pity Divine, in Jesu's face
> To see, adore, and love."

III. We direct attention briefly to the manner and issue of the Redeemer's work. There are four thoughts suggested by the passage.

1. We are told that he works *unostentatiously.* "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." Is not this in keeping with all the characteristics of the Saviour? Pretenders

vaunt insolently of their claims, and are elated by a momentary triumph. He is "meek and lowly in spirit." His heart beats with even pulse, whether the palm-branches are strewed in his path or the thorns are twisted for his crown. False Christs are turbulent and haughty, "boasting themselves to be somebody." He withdrew from the royalty which the people would fain have forced upon him, and charged the healed demoniacs that they should not make him known. Political demagogues raise tumults for selfish ends. He had no war with Cæsar, forbade the sword to his disciples, steadily discountenanced the risings of their patriot pride, and impressed upon them that in the diviner monarchy, which was above trappings and legions, he reigned as King for ever. And so quietly has Christianity spread its influences upon men. Not the whirlwind, the earthquake, the pestilence, but the dew, the seed, the leaven—things which work quietly, mighty forces, resistless from the might of their silence —these are its emblems. The kingdom of God commonly cometh not with observation. Physical convulsions may precede it. The whirlwind of passion, and the earthquake which shaketh the nations, and the fire, consuming to all olden wrong, and all encumbering circumstance, may be the couriers of the Gospel, but it speaketh in the "still small voice"—that majestic whisper which always makes a silence for itself—however loud and rude the clamour. It does not "strive nor cry," but without strife or crying makes its way into the conscience of the world.

We are told, again, that this work is done *tenderly*— with the utmost mercifulness, and long-suffering. "A

bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." What a beautiful representation of the perfection of gentleness is here drawn for us! Let the images live before you. The dying night-lamp glimmering ghostly through the darkness in the sick-room, when all the world is still, the oil dried up, the last leap of the flame, the curling smoke, the only and offensive trace of recent fire—a kindled lamp for all purposes of utility gone out.

Again. The banks of some solitary tarn, with the dreary moorland all around it, the shrill cry of the bittern the only sound that breaks upon the dumb, dead air; and there, by the sluggish pool, a reed, the sport of the fierce wind, bruised by many tempests, very frail, very lonely, about the most friendless and uncared for object in the world. If man were in question, how would the bruised reed and smoking flax be treated? Would not the surly hand quench the one, and the rude foot of the wayfarer trample down the other? But he, who is gentler and kinder than human, props the reed and fans the flax, until the one becomes strong in Jehovah's strength, and the other a flame burning brightly and cheerily to his praise. Poor soul, ready-to-halt through all the days of thy pilgrimage, over whom storms have swept pitilessly, and scared from thy side the help of human friends—poor soul, who hast the memory of a brighter religious life stifled by worldly care or evil passion, thy heart an altar where no fire has been lately kindled, there is comfort in the Word for thee. The Saviour is great in gentleness, his mightiest energy is to redeem and save. "A bruised reed shall he not break,

and the smoking flax shall he not quench." And so tenderly does he watch over the progress of the Gospel in the world. He bears with infirm purpose, and does not always chide the rash or hasty deed. To him the day of small things is but the promise of a glorious future. He is not impatient of growth nor of fruit. He gives time for the blossoming above, and for the clasping of the broad roots below. He is not fretted by the heathen's rage nor by the people's vanity. In the most degenerate Israel, he sees the seven thousand faithful who have never bowed the knee to Baal; and he waits to be gracious to the proudest rebel, and does not spurn the humblest beggar, and has room in his heart for the affections of the simplest child.

We are told, again, that this work is done *perseveringly and successfully:* "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." It is a plain and unmistakeable prediction. Judgment shall be set in the earth; and the isles, isolated so long, but patiently longing for deliverance and sympathy—"the isles shall wait for his law." This is a settled matter, which the risen Saviour sits "expecting" to realize, and which the faith of believers may anticipate on the warrant of his Word. The years may come and go with but little apparent progress; the armies of the enemy may be as gaily caparisoned, and as boastful of victory; the fortresses may seem to be without a breach; the scorners may be loud in their ribaldry; the standard-bearer may be stricken, and the banner itself soiled with dust and stained with blood—but there is not the interval of a moment in the Saviour's march to triumph, calm as the

sun in the heavens. He bringeth forth judgment unto victory. Noiseless, but constant as the flight of time, he presses to his assured purpose, and waits for the expected end. He is not discouraged by sinister omens or unwonted opposition, by faithless traitors, or by wearied friends. None of the ordinary causes of failure operate in him. Men fail because they underrate difficulties and make no careful counting of the cost, or because they work without a heart and consequently without a will, or because there is a misgiving that the work itself is unworthy, or because death touches them suddenly in the midst of their toil. He saw the end from the beginning, calculated every danger, measured the stature and strength of every enemy. He loved the work so well, that for its sake he delighted in the baptism of the fire. He feels the work to be the noblest, the highest destiny for man, the most magnificent revelation of God. He ever liveth, and only hath Immortality. "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged." Against embattled earth, and gathered forces of the pit, he shall bring forth judgment unto victory, until he rests from his labour, until he gathers his children, until he wears his crown.

III.

SAUL, THE GOD-DESERTED MAN.

"And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."—1 SAM. xxviii. 15.

YOU will at once imagine that we are not about to occupy our time to-night in what, under less important circumstances, might be an interesting topic of discussion, viz. the various theories which have been advanced touching this notable visit of Saul to the Witch of Endor. We mention those theories only so far as is necessary to clear our way to an intelligent and profitable treatment of the subject before us. The theories of exposition have varied, as might have been expected, according to the character of the minds which have respectively held them. Some have supposed that the appearance of Samuel was a real one, effected by Satanic agency. To this there is the fatal objection, that it gives to the Spirit of evil a power over the spirits of the just, which Scripture nowhere warrants, and against which every feeling within us conspires in rebellion. Some, again, have resolved the whole affair into imposture, and account for the phantom by

jugglery, and for the voice by ventriloquism; while others hold to the belief that Samuel actually appeared, and that his appearance was effected by an agency that was distinctly Divine. The theory which supposes imposture, acting upon an excited and highly credulous imagination, is perhaps most in accordance with the rationalizing tendencies of the age; though, if we remember that it was an age in which the sorcerer lived, in which the sin of witchcraft was denounced amongst others as one of which there was likelihood that some would be guilty, the absolute rejection of the supernatural would seem to be more sceptical than sound. Might it not have been that the woman intended to juggle, and had prepared herself accordingly, but that the result, by Divine interposition, was other and higher than her incantations knew? She seems to have been frightened at the effect of her own words—startled at the cloaked and venerable form which, unexpectedly to herself, had arisen as if in answer to her spell. Moreover, the authoritative rebuke of the unhappy monarch's transgression, and the sure word of prophecy which accurately foretold his doom, can hardly be supposed to have come from any other than lips that were inspired; and God's inspiration would not be conferred on one whose life was a righteous forfeit to his own law. He who brought Moses and Elias from the spirit-land to be present at the priestly baptism of the Saviour, and to confer, upon the holy mount, on the glories of the consummated redemption, might not hesitate to pronounce upon a reprobate sinner, by the very lips which had so often and so faithfully warned him, the sentence of his doom; and after dream and Urim and

prophet had alike ceased their warning and their comfort, to condemn him by the very voice which himself had disquieted from the grave. Thus much—not intended to be either dogmatic or exhaustive—upon the circumstances under which the words before us were uttered. It is of far more importance that we prepare ourselves to learn the solemn lessons, and to be warned by the terrible example. We have before us a picture, which we can scarcely find elsewhere in the Bible, of a God-deserted man—one who has in former times had plenteous advantage and revelation, but who has forsaken God, until God has forsaken him in turn, and who is now joined to his idols, seared against the penitent desire—one who presents that most appalling of all wrecks of ruin—a human soul consciously severed from the sympathy, and bereft of the favour, of the Divine. Let us reverently listen to the teachings which the life of such an one inculcates, while, with all the fervency of a spirit alive to its danger, we earnestly deprecate his doom.

I. *And, first, there is illustrated here the accelerating progress of evil.*—Can you imagine a greater contrast than between this restless and wretched coward, who evokes Hell's aid perchance to baffle Heaven, and that comely youth who stood among the people at Mizpeh, with another heart within his bosom, and in stately presence higher than them all? What has chanced to cloud so fair a promise, and to darken so bright a sky? The chosen alike of God and man, as ingenuously modest as he was famed for manly beauty—of valour in fight, of clemency in victory—rushing like a

lion to the rescue of the men of Jabesh-gilead, sparing the lives of the men of Belial, who affected to despise him, even as the lion spurns to trample on the dead —humble in his ascription of praise, and devout and eager in his sacrifice of peace-offerings, and in his recognition of God as the giver of victory: never, surely, did a reign open fairer; but how has the fine gold become dim!

From the monarch on the eve of the battle of Jabesh-gilead, to the monarch on the eve of the battle of Gilboa, what a fearful fall! What has wrought it? What has made the brave a trembler, and the prosperous deserted, and driven the king of Israel to consort with them that wrought folly, even with the muttering sorceress whose very presence he had interdicted in the land? Oh, it is the same influence which worked the original curse into the world, which swept away the primitive Eden, and branded the man who tilled it, and which through the advancing ages has sharpened every anguish and has shaped every sepulchre—the same dark secret that is written upon all unhappy hearts to-day—Saul has suffered, because Saul has sinned. In his elevation he had forgotten God. Pride had stolen away his heart; he had been guilty of repeated and flagrant disobedience. Selected to do a certain work, he had omitted to perform it; and in his usurpation of the priestly office, in his ostentatious will-worship, in the rebellion which spared the Amalekite alive, in his jealousy and self-consuming rage, and in his butchery of the Lord's anointed, we see the graduated scale of deeper and still deeper crime — pride, impatience of restraint, the sinful purpose, the disobedient deed, the

cherished hate, jealousy, madness, murder. Oh, look into that dark cave of Endor; see, amid congenial night and sights and sounds unholy, that haggard man, who, now that Heaven is silent, would fain make league with Hell—mark his countenance, ghastly with the wanness of despair—see the struggling hell within his bosom, as anger wrestles for the mastery with fear—look upon that sad, trampled vassal of impiety, as he lies unkinged along the ground, the heart smitten out of him by the tidings of the morrow. Can there be a more sorrowful exhibition of the Nature's fall? Can there be a more affecting illustration of the bitterness of forsaking God? Do we not seem to hear a voice, as it might be the sigh of some pitying angel, wailing plaintively over the prostration of a goodly shrine, proclaiming the cause, that it may be branded and hated by ourselves? "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." It is for our own profit to gaze and to meditate upon this fallen king, for it is the same enemy of sin against which we have all of us to contend. We need not, alas! go back to ancient Israel in search of moral ruins. They are in the midst of us, all around us; our path is strewed with the columns that were shattered by the successive shocks of the one great earthquake of the fall. You may perhaps have read the story, how a stout denier of the universal taint of humanity once paused before two companion pictures that were hung up to view. The one represented a laughing child, with large round eyes, and open brow and waving curls that goldened in the sunshine, and cheeks whose damask shamed the ripening fruit—wearing that happy

smile which can be worn but once in life, the smile whose ripples are tangled by no weeds of suspicion and break upon no strand of doubt—looking gaily from the fair earth into the blue heaven, with no misgiving that there were serpents in the bushes of the one, nor tempests in the bosom of the other. From the canvas of the second picture glared a wolfish eye, the home of all dark subtlety and shamelessness; and in the gloom of a dimly-lighted cell you could perceive the matted hair and sullen brow and blood-stained garments of a murderer. Chains clanked heavily, or seemed to clank, upon the limbs. Everything told of the desperate character of the man; and his countenance wore an expression of almost demon hate, as if in his ferocity he cursed his fetters and his fate together. Upon these two pictures the thoughtful gaze was fixed, until at last the exclamation broke out in a tone of half-concealed triumph—"Do you mean to say that there is an equal taint in the natures of those two, or that any amount of contagion or of evil teaching could develope that guileless child into that godless and hardened man?" when, alas! for his theory, he was told that the pictures had both of them been drawn from the life, and were portraits of the same individual at different stages of his history. Oh! read you not the moral of the tale? are you not prepared to take its warning? There is an accelerating speed in an ungodly course, which increases like the momentum of an avalanche; and the experience of melancholy thousands and the testimony of Scripture assure us that it is an easy descent to perdition, when the bias of the nature is seconded by the strenuous endeavours

of the will. Sinner, wherever thou art, thy only safety is to stop to-day. Beware lest thy sin become habit, and thy habit obduracy, and thy obduracy hardening and despair. Resolves for the future are powerless, for each moment of thy continued bondage forges for thee new fetters of iron. Such is the deceitfulness of sin, such the fleetness of its noiseless but rapid motions, that if thou yieldest to its initial influence, thou art entangled before thou art aware; blind to the danger, until, agonized and remorseful, thou hast a fearful awaking at the end. No man ever intended to bring upon himself disgrace and ruin. A man trembles at his first fraud, blushes at his first lie. In those grim hulks, or on that endless wheel of labour, you will find multitudes who have hearts, though they have cased them from impression as in breastplates of steel. If you could get them to tell the secrets of their history, you would startle, perhaps, to find them so much like your own — good resolutions, early home-training, deathless memories of mothers' prayers, but strong temptations, feeble resistance, gay and godless associates —a first fall, from which the wrestler never rose, multiplied concealments to hide it, then the open forwardness, and the casting off the mask of shame. Oh, take the truth to your hearts—no man became ever all at once a criminal, a hypocrite, a villain; and from the sight of this forsaken man, who has slid rapidly down, until to-night we see him on the last rung of the ladder, and we know that to-morrow he shall be a dishonoured suicide, let us beware of the deceitfulness of sin, let us shudder from it into the Saviour's arms—outstretched, thank God, to-day; let us not rest in any false or

fraudulent hope which Jesus has not granted, lest haply we come delicately, like Agag, saying, "The bitterness of death is past," when the axe gleams already in the lifted hand of Justice, and the mother that bare us is about to be childless among women.

The subject teaches, secondly—

II. *That to every sinner there will come his moment of need.*—It may be that in his delirium of success and empire there came, for a long period, no thought of the God he had deserted, to the mind of Saul. One by one his means of spiritual communication ceased; but he felt no lack of their guidance, and therefore took no heed of their departure. Samuel was gathered to his fathers; there was no longer the seer in Israel; the Urim glittered not upon the breast of the high priest, for he had fallen a victim to the Monarch's rage. Gradually the whispers of conscience became fainter, and the good Spirit of God forbore to strive; yet prosperity encircled him, his banners floated freely, day after day found his royalty untarnished, the same supple courtiers round him, the same appliances of wealth or pleasure. So long he felt no need, but there came another time upon his soul. He had alienated the affection of Jonathan, and had driven from the ranks of his army the loyal harp and trusty sword of David. The Philistines, who had given him short respite, had again invaded the land, and were encamped in Shunem, and he knew that they were a well-appointed and numerous host, better armed and disciplined than his own. The kingdom seemed in imminent peril; and his arm had lost its bravery, because his heart had gone from the

trust which gave it courage. Then it was that the sense of loneliness overcame him, and the consciousness of all that he had lost rushed in full flood upon his soul. Then he remembered the Lord he had forsaken, and cried to him in his distress, but the heavens were as brass unto his prayers. No dream inspired his darkness, nor Urim gave him counsel, nor prophet spake to cheer him by his sagacity and power. Oh, the dread solitude of the God-forsaken man! How frantic his remorse, how abject and spiritless his terror!

Long would he brood over the days of early promise, and vainly would he long for their return. He had often fretted against the faithful prophet's words, had longed to be freed from his presence, had deemed his reproofs an impertinence against his throne. But how gladly would he recall him now! What a passionate intensity of regret couches in the words, "Bring me up Samuel." "Let me hear his voice again, even if he speak in anger, and tell of judgment. Anything rather than this long, drear, terrible, dooming silence! Oh that I knew where I might find him! I would go after him even into the sepulchre, and again were a cheap price to pay for just one assuring word." This hour of need and loneliness, when the spirit cries out in its extremity of anguish, comes some time to every man. The worldling may prolong his revelry, and accumulate his gain, but the hour will come when he will discover that the world is a cheat, and that riches cannot always profit. The sinner may seem to pursue his course with impunity; he may heap up riches from the world's commerce, and gather from its societies a revenue of adulation; all he does may seem, in

spontaneous alchemy, to turn itself into gold, and his hardness of heart and contempt of God's word and commandment may seem to hold him in stead as good, as if there were neither law nor God. But the Eternal One is neither dead nor sleeping, and all the delayed vengeance which he has heaped up against himself will be poured out upon him—it may be in his wintry age, it may be on his forsaken deathbed. I may speak to some to-night, who have sometimes shuddered beneath the thunders of the law, but who have shaken off the impression, and who are complacent in the hope that skies are as bright, and frames as strong, and prospects as far-reaching and as gay for them as ever. Deem it not cruel in me if I shatter your hollow joy. From the past you are auguring the future; and "because sentence against your evil work has not been executed speedily," you are indulging in the dream that it is indefinitely postponed. Ah, why thus abuse the long-suffering of your Judge? Is it a time for laughter or for thankfulness, when the condemned cell opens to the minister of mercy, who bears the kind reprieve? Your hour of need may be nearer than you think. God's mercy may still delay it—but *it will come*, the hour of trial, when sorrow breaks upon sorrow, as billows upon a desolate strand. It will come—the hour of affliction, when racked frame and paining nerves confuse the brain, and the tossing of the illness prevents the continuity of the prayer. It will come—the hour of abandonment, when no friends can solace and no daughters of music can charm; when, lonelier than hermit in his cell, or than prisoner in his dungeon, the spirit will fret in a solitude which is but a hopeless

and protracted dying. It will come—the hour of death, when the lean hands must grapple with their fate; when Being is discovered in its nakedness, with all its flowers and music gone; when the veil is folded o'er the earth, and there opens up on the scared spirit the boundless, the avenging, the unseen. It will come—and you must meet it, whether or not you are ready. I adjure you, prepare for it now; don't wait till your soul writhes in its grasp before you begin. That's a poor chance you have to think and pray, when the tears scald the cheek and the fever hottens in the veins, when you quiver with the agony of some present pain, or quake from the apprehension of some additional disaster, when the physician at the bed's head and the shadow at its foot wage with each other the unequal strife. Oh, don't wait for that. Flee to the ever-willing Saviour now, and then his guidance will be yours in sorrow; your days and nights alike shall be under the protection of the mystic pillar, and you shall have no need to work some foul enchantment in order to wring direction from the sheeted dead.

There is illustrated again, in this subject *the terrible power of conscience.* That there is in the world a faculty of conscience, remaining faithful long after other faculties have betrayed their trust, like an incorruptible warder whose colleagues have been bribed, is a point which I might fearlessly call upon every one of you to prove. You feel it within you; you know that upon your every action it holds its assize, and it pronounces its decisions. When the heart is renewed by grace, and the Holy Spirit bears his direct

and glorious witness to adoption, the conscience becomes an occasion of joy, and in the witness which it bears to fidelity sends a thrill of gladness through the soul. "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience." On the other hand, it is impossible to exaggerate the terror which an accusing conscience works within the mind of the sinner. It has been acutely observed, that very much both of human misery and of human sinfulness spring from the workings of an evil conscience. A conscience aroused but not appeased may be a powerful prompter to evil. The turbulence of human passion may be often the frantic endeavour of the mind to *stifle* the monitor which it cannot still. And just as the mainspring of a watch, disordered, sends irregularity through the whole of its machinery, so it is possible for the conscience, prince among the faculties, to derange instead of directing the rest. And who shall tell the horror of the man whom an accusing conscience harasses? It will blanch Belshazzar's cheek, before the seer's lips trace out the mystic characters which blaze upon the wall. It will startle Herod into ashen tremor, as he deems the murdered John the Baptist to be risen from the dead. It will break up the fountains of Marah within the recreant but true-souled apostle, and send Peter out to weep bitterly for his sin. It will hound the traitor Judas to his dark tryst with Death within the field of blood. And so in the case of Saul. His conscience had foredoomed him. His insane desire to penetrate the future was but the gambler's last chance, when, the wealthy fortune gone, he risks the silver piece, it is so small. His greatest enemy was within—the wounded

spirit, a more dreaded foe than all Philistia's armies—the dogs of remorse more furious than the dogs of war.

And so it is always with the sinner. Speak I not to-night to those who can affirm it for themselves? Your consciences have spoken to you, and you could not choose but listen. You have tried, perhaps, to be an infidel, to jest away the authority from the Bible, or to bind the government of God in slumber. But conscience has not been deluded, and has pressed home upon you the eye that ever marks you, and the Word by which you will be tried. You have tried to believe that there is no future for you, that retribution is the dream of fools; that the worms which banquet on the clay, devour the consequences both of men's virtues and of their crimes. But conscience would not let you believe it, haunted you in your veriest intoxication with the certainty of the Judgment, and by her lacerating rebukes raised up a hell within, as her surest evidence that there is a hell beyond. Oh, if it were possible to follow some of you, as you pass from the sanctuary to-night, and to read your hearts, what would be written there? Failing health and broken rest, and clouded life and dismal bodings of the future, all because your consciences are ill at ease, and burdened with the guiltiness of sin from which no Saviour has annealed you. And shall it continue thus? Shall conscience always be a hostile and stern reprover? Will you always be in dread of its sting? Or will you not rather come to him who will pacify it, who can still a tempest with a word, whether it rage upon a lake of Galilee, or surge and swell in a poor sinner's soul?

There is further glanced at in the subject, *the forsaken one's despair.* It is only glanced at, and we shall spare to do more. "Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him." The dread secret which his fears foreboded, and which his conscience had already pronounced, is now confirmed by the words of the anointed one, whom he has roused from dreamless rest only to hear from him his nearing doom. In reversal of ordinary rules—the certainty is more intolerable than the suspense—there lurked perhaps within him some unconscious hope that the worst might after all be averted; and, clinging to this spar of frail support, he had battled with the tossing thoughts within him, as a drowning mariner buffets the fierce waves which, like serpents, hiss before they swallow. But now that has died out, and Despair, the usurper, thrones itself on the fall of a man, created in the image of God. Oh, fearful spectacle for freemen and immortals to behold! A crushed nature, a life without a hope, without a purpose, without a sympathy—a trampled heart, through which, as through a beaten thoroughfare, all heavy-footed trials come and go—a spirit for which the light of the past is lurid, and the light of the future has gone out! Oh, drop the curtain, let the veil fall darkly to hide from us the fearful scene. We cannot bear it; it harrows up our inmost souls to gaze on a despairing man. But, as we "wander witheringly" away, let the moan become articulate, and let the warning fall solemnly into our hearts, "It is an evil and a bitter thing" to sin against God.

And now, why is it that we have brought this subject before you? It were cruel to paint in sombre colours for effect, and to dwell upon a ruined nature to those of whom the presented character were prophetic, and who were pressing hopelessly to the same inevitable end. Credit me, I pray you, with an aim that is far holier, and a purpose that is far more kind.

As to the last dark thought I mentioned, *that* need not come to you. I don't believe in despair for ransomed men. On this side the grave—if you were sure that you should live to make it—even the *late* repentance is not vain. But I do believe that there are those among you who, now that the year has closed upon you, are more hardened in sin, and more fitted than when the year began for the penalties of the prison and the fire. You have felt the accelerating power of evil; you have put away the consciousness of the hour of need. You have tried hard to silence the accusing conscience; and, after affectionate warnings, for which your hearts are witnesses, and a fidelity in the declaration of the truth as it is in Jesus—which I dare you to deny—you are at this day alien from Christ, withholding the homage of the heart which he has claimed, and which he died to redeem. There can be but one end to this, if you continue impenitent—"indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." I deprecate that doom for you—I would not have you fall into that doom. The Saviour awaits the coming of penitent hearts, is ever ready to join them on their travel, and make their hearts burn within them as he talketh with them by the way. Come and give yourselves to him

now. You need work no enchantments. *He* will not say to *you* as did Samuel to the affrighted Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" You need not "ascend into heaven . . . to bring Christ down from above, or descend into the deep . . . to bring up Christ again from the dead; but . . . if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

IV.

BACKSLIDING.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."—REV. ii., part of ver. 5.

"GREAT is Diana of the Ephesians." With ceaseless and earnest clamour rose and swelled the cry, passed from lip to lip and from street to street, until the whole city was in confusion. Craftsmen, jealous for the honour of their craft, and idolaters, jealous for the honour of their deity, joined in common cause, and had great wrath and zeal together, as they dragged into the place of public meeting certain alleged offenders; while the multitude—like all multitudes—are smitten with sudden sympathy of panic; though, inflamed and unreasoning, the greater part know not wherefore they are come together. What is the meaning of it all? What has startled the quiet city of Ephesus from its classic and elegant repose? What strange shadow has come upon the "great goddess Diana," that uproar should be roused and revel within the precincts of her sacred fane? The "way" about which this "no small stir" has arisen is the ministering to the Gentiles the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the lips of the Apostle Paul. It would be a solemn and a singular scene to have witnessed the first public

triumph of Christianity, when bearded men, read in the lore of books, and wise with the experience of years—men who had striven for the secrets of alchemy, or had waved the magician's wand, or had woven the cabalistic spell, or practised all dark acts of wizardry—"brought their books together, and burned them before all the people; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." As we witness this marvellous victory of faith over interest, of simple truth over lucrative and ancient error, we cease to wonder at the malignity of the opposition, and are not surprised that Satan should have stirred up his emissaries in one last convulsive effort to re-establish his empire there. The church, thus founded in the city of Ephesus, continued for a long series of years to extend its borders, and to consolidate its strength. There are interesting traditions concerning some years of its prosperous history, when the Apostle John, silver-haired and venerable with age, was carried into their public assemblies, that he might bless them with wise and timely counsel, and that they might be instructed by the loving words of the once beloved disciple, who had lain upon the bosom of the Lord.

In acknowledgment of their rapid growth in grace, and perhaps also of the costly sacrifices which they had made for the truth's sake, God inspired his servant to address to them an epistle, rich above all others in developments of the fellowship of the mystery, and in unfoldings of the inner life which is hid with Christ in God. They seem to have retained many of the characteristics of manly and vigorous piety, even when corruption had entered upon other churches

once flourishing as they; and in the epistle that is now before us—written to the angel or minister, and containing in accurate summary all matters of commendation or of censure which the eye of the Searcher had discovered—there is much which would leave even model churches in our modern times very far behind. They were laborious in duty, and patient in suffering; they shrank in holy sensitiveness from unworthy companionship—they could "not bear them which were evil."

With true discrimination of an apostle's character and office, they had tested those who had simulated an apostleship, and had found them liars. They had prosecuted their holy toil with pure motives, for even the Heart-searcher says of them, "*For my name's sake* thou hast laboured." They had had hearts of constancy, for they "fainted not" under the pressure of difficulty and sorrow. What is lacking in this almost perfect picture? What of shortcoming can tarnish the lustre of this resplendent piety? Alas! it is there — the incipient apostasy, the departure from the fresh affection with which their hearts had kindled after God. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

Without any pretensions to Ephesian piety, there are confessedly in the present day many lamentable instances of defective or forsaken profession. Those who are fallen *in* the church, and those who are fallen *from* the church, are both to be found in the midst of us. The world abounds with backsliders in heart and in life; and if the census could be taken of the multitudes now irreligious, of the prayerless households and

Sabbathless families, who have been at some time or other in connection with our various churches, the result would be something absolutely appalling. It cannot be unprofitable for us, therefore, to direct attention to a subject so momentous, reminding you—

I. *Of some of the ordinary causes of falling.*
II. *Of the signs that it has taken place.*

I. There is implied in the very wording of the text that there had been the possession of religion. Those cannot fall who have never attained; and it is impossible to remember the characteristics of the Ephesian church, and the fact of its being addressed in such regretful and affectionate warning, without arriving at the conclusion that it had "tasted" largely "of the grace of God, and felt the powers of the world to come." There are many of those usually designated backsliders, who have never realized the conscious enjoyment of religion. Under some conjuncture of circumstances, smarting under disappointment, softened by affliction, or standing by a freshly-opened grave, they have come under impression; seriousness has settled on their brow, their sensibilities have been reached and stirred, and for awhile they have manifested great concern, and some measure of delight in the services and hopes of the sanctuary; but the heart was not changed. And by and by the restraint has begun to be irksome, and the old longing has come for the pleasures of sin, and they have relapsed into more than the former inveteracy of evil. These, of course, are in circumstances of equal guilt and equal peril; but they are

not in the text made the subjects of specific warning. The address is to those who were once converted, who felt the transformation of the Gospel, and were gladdened by its hope immortal, but who have fallen; and to some of the prominent causes of apostasy we will for a moment address ourselves, and we may mention—

1. *Adverse or persecuting influences brought to bear upon the soul.*—In the personal history of the Redeemer, the moment of his arrest was the moment of his disciples' desertion; and when the spears of the Roman band glanced through the thickets of Gethsemane, "then all the disciples forsook him and fled." Even the earnest and affectionate Peter turned recreant in the continued presence of danger, and faltered forth the cowardly utterance, "I know not the man." Instances might easily be gathered from the history of the church, in which, in times of persecution and danger, there has been a lamentable falling away. And, in truth, there must be an inwrought conviction, a stern and sturdy principle, to give birth to Christian heroism, to hold fast to unpopular opinions and repulsive truths, to keep an unblenching faith in sight of the fetters and the scaffold. There are multitudes who, like Cranmer, would recant at the vision of the stake, but who would not, like Cranmer, nobly avenge their reputation by invoking the fiercest of the fire to be wreaked upon "this unworthy hand." Sometimes, when external persecution is quiet, men are deterred by domestic opposition, and a man's foes to spiritual decision "are those of his own household." The Father interposes his authority in

forbiddance of his child's devotion; the husband compels the wife to detach herself from the people of God; the sister rallies the brother out of his seriousness; or the affection, which ought to hallow the home with a deeper sacredness, by entwining round it the supports of religion, unwinds the tendril spirit from its safest and surest clinging. And who, that knows anything of the power and preciousness of the home-affections, will deny that their appeal to the spirit is well-nigh irresistible, and that, when they plead on the side of ungodliness, that peril is the chiefest of all. You have seen the results, alas! too often. Sometimes by the threat of disinheritance, sometimes by the shafts of ridicule, hurled remorselessly against a proud and sensitive heart, a young man, just entering upon life under solemn impressions of responsibility, has been shaken in his resolve and turned into the path of the scorner; or a fair girl, the promise of whose opening womanhood was given to Christ—an early and accepted espousal—has been plunged into a round of heartless folly, and has gone through life with the remorseful consciousness, inspoken to her conscience as from a disappointed Saviour, that she had left her first love. Brethren, I would not undermine the obligations of parental authority, nor limit the influence of that outflowing love, which in its tenderness emparadises home; but when either the command of a parent, or the beseeching of a friend, whispers of rebellion against God, at all hazards the pleading must be resisted, at all hazards the command must be disobeyed. The trial may be painful, and the struggle severe. It is sad to feel

familiarity interrupted, and friendship subsiding into coldness, and the warm embrace of cordiality exchanged for the indifferent salutation or the look of contemptuous pity. It is hard to have the sentence of exclusion from the hearthstone and from the heart where we were equally housed before, and to know that even in the eyes that used to flash lightnings of sunniest welcome to us, we are "as an heathen man and a publican;" but God will give us strength, if we ask him, even for our most difficult day; and if we overcome influences adverse and formidable as these, rare will be the beauty of the jewels which shall sparkle in our crown.

2. *An overweening attachment to the present world.* —There are many instances recorded in Scripture, and more presented to us in the daily experience of life, in which the influence of the present and of the external has so fascinated the senses and absorbed the interest, that men have forsaken their "first" religious "works," and lived in careless unconsciousness of the world to come; and sometimes a glittering bribe, or the prospect of worldly advantage, has caused some who had "begun in the spirit to end" ingloriously "in the flesh." So Demas forsook apostolic companionship for lucre's sake. So the young man over whom the Saviour yearned, threw away his hope of heaven rather than rend his heart from his amassed and well-loved treasure. So the multitudes thronged upon Jesus, until he explained to them the spirituality of his mission and of his rewards; and then one by one they slunk away from his side, for "they had sought him, not because they saw the miracles, but because they did eat of the

loaves and were filled." So Ananias and Sapphira imperilled their souls, and brought down upon themselves swift destruction, from the niggard greed of gold. So Judas, possessed of Mammon—the least erect of all that fell from heaven—compassed the betrayal of his Master, by transgression fell from his apostleship, and passed out of life a remorseful and unhallowed suicide. And, in the very nature of things, the absorption of energy demanded to fulfil the cravings of overweening worldliness cannot consist with earnest and devoted piety. There are consequently numbers who once ran well, but whom business has hindered, or the care of a family has hindered, or the search for a reputation has hindered, or the making haste to be rich has hindered; and who, under the pressure of engrossing anxieties, have forsaken the guide of their youth, and have forgotten the covenant of their God. And, brethren, it is impossible to think about the prevalent tendencies of the age, with its conformity to the world in dress, in amusements, in slavery to fashion, in commercial practices, without perceiving in this respect a great and pressing danger. Worldliness, with siren voice and in attractive form, is tempting the churches from their stedfastness; and it is for you, trembling and prayerful, to watch and be sober, lest the strange woman overcome you with her harlotry, and, powerless in resistance, you yield to the gay dalliance, and forsake your first love.

3. *Self-confidence.* — Another fruitful source of apostasy arises from the unwarranted reliance which many place in their own strength to secure them in the hour of peril. They have never sufficiently felt

the plague of their own hearts. They are ignorant of the power of allurement, and of the impetuosity of passion, and of the infernal skilfulness which adapts the temptation to the propensity, and which plans and presents the well-circumstanced sin. They cannot calculate the resources of the beleaguering army. They suspect not the vacillation of their own traitor-souls. Hence, when the enemy comes in as a flood, they invoke no Spirit of the Lord to lift up a standard against him, and by consequence they are worsted in the flight, and, as on the hills of Gilboa, the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away. You see a remarkable illustration of this in the case of the Apostle Peter. How warm his professions of attachment! How confident in his own power to be leal-hearted in affection to the death! How demonstrative his love, in ready tear and fluent word and eager impulse, to unneeded action! How often, when the enemies were away, did the martial ardour kindle in the eye, and the hand grasp the sword-hilt, as if he were impatient to be the avenger of his Master's wrongs! With what complacent consciousness of superior strength did he look down upon his fellow-disciples! "Though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." And when the Master, a calm and sorrowful Prophet, repeated the prediction in his ears—with increased emphasis, as if by his importunity he would baffle the omniscience which detected the weakness within him, he exclaims, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." It is not difficult for any analyst of mind to trace in this self-confidence one of the prime causes of Peter's fall. And it is so everywhere. Find

us a man anywhere in the church of Christ who cherishes this atheistic self-reliance, who deems the praise of others languid and their devotion inconsiderable by comparison with his own, who imagines his piety so palpable that it cannot possibly be questioned, to whom reproof is impertinence and restraint bondage—and you find us a man, whatever he may think of himself, who plays with the fang of the serpent, who treads upon the verge of the precipice, who wantons with the consuming flame; for it is a well-known and indisputable maxim of inspiration, that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

4. *A neglect of secret intercourse with God.*—Any one who is acquainted with a religious life, will admit that the graces and virtues of the Christian, whether they bloom in beautiful development or are exhibited in valiant action, must be fostered and nurtured in the closet. Only the heart that has renewed its strength on the mount, can maintain its consistent walk with the multitude, and its influential citizenship in the world; and it is certain that many of the temptations under whose terrible pressure so many are apt to yield, would either be entirely disarmed, or would assail with diminished power, if the soul were strengthened for the onset by secret fellowship and prayer. So generally is this understood, that it has passed almost into a proverb, that backsliding commences in the closet; and could you trace to their source many of those foul apostasies which have scandalized the church, and made merriment in the seat of the scorner—could the poor backslider tell his

own tale, and with remorseful agony trace up for you the history of his lapse, and loss, and fall—he would take you to the inner shrine where the excellent glory should have lingered, and, showing you an altar barren of a sacrifice, and bearing no traces of recent fire, he would tell you with a sigh that the earliest apostasy was there. If you see a man whose activities are so excessive that he has no time for closet devotion, tremble for him, for he is in danger. *He* will be the bravest in duty and the firmest in battle, who has been conversing with God in the closet before he came out into the field. The vestal fire of our devotion, which the grace Divine has kindled, will soon be extinguished by the "many waters" that are abroad to quench it, unless in the secrecy of individual consciousness, the blessed Spirit pour oil upon the flame. Oh, if you would withstand the evil and secure the good, if you would maintain your stedfastness as an iron pillar or as a wall of brass, if you would be one of God's heroes, approved for Christian consistency and endurance, let no cloud darken upon your secret oratory, let the dust never gather upon that symbol of the mercy-seat, build your closet in the clefts of the sacrificial hill, and from the noisy danger or the vexing trial flee to it as your shelter and your home.

We are to notice, briefly—

II. *The signs that it has taken place.*—The Scriptures speak of individuals who may have left their first love, while many of the characteristics of a religious profession continue to be maintained—backsliders in heart, who hang on as useless incumbrances to a church from

which their affections are estranged. In Ephesus, although they had left their first love—in Sardis, where the graces languished and were ready to die—in Laodicea, where a lethargic lukewarmness had dulled away the energy of devotion—there was the maintenance of outward decorousness and the continuance in the fellowship of saints. And in our churches now, it is to be feared that there are numbers who realize the terrible description of the prophet, that "grey hairs are upon them"—premonitions of mortality, signs of weakness and of age—"and they know it not." Are there not some of you who are conscious that it is not with you as it once was—the candle of the Lord at best sheds a dim and clouded radiance, instead of burning brightly in your tabernacle, as it did of yore. You have relinquished perhaps all active usefulness in the church; you allege that the season of your service is past; you fancy that infirmities cling to you; you had rather cease to labour for Christ, and withdraw from the enterprises of religion and benevolence which you formerly sustained. You are infrequent and irregular now in your attendance at the house of God; on the week-nights you ask not often for the blessing; you are rarely found in the class-meeting, never in the meeting for social and supplicating prayer. When you *are* in the sanctuary, there is an air of listlessness, a callous and stolid indifference, which contrasts strangely with the eagerness with which, in other times, you drank in rich draughts of the living and life-giving Word. Since you have become unwatchful over your own practice, you have become censorious in your judgment of others; you have contracted a

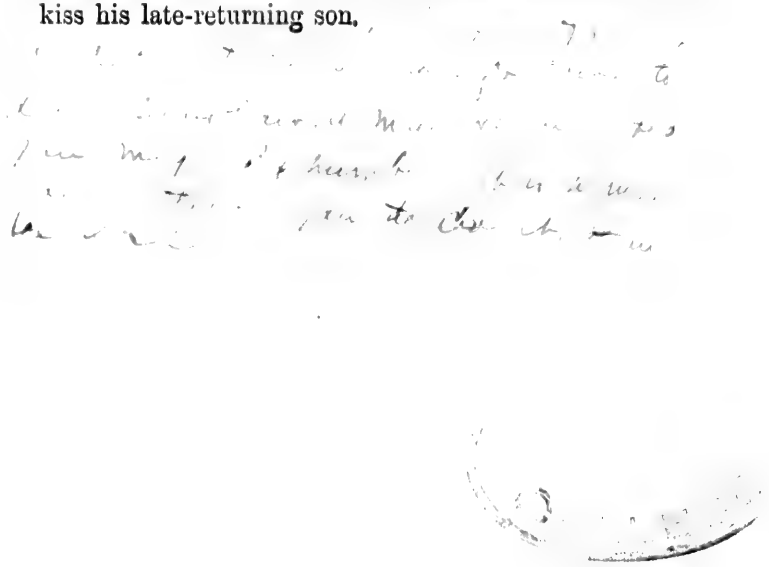
strange and uncomely habit of evil speaking. Like the gadfly on the charger's back, you have become prone to pass over all that is healthy, and fasten with a sort of carrion appetite upon the one sore place; to censure you are rapid and eager, to commend you are tardy and unwilling. You have lost your spiritual-mindedness, and enter as keenly into the world's gold-strife as the veriest worldling around you; you cannot spare time for the concerns of eternity in your absorbing solicitude after the interests of time. Brethren, in your inner man do you plead guilty to any of these charges? Has it seemed to you that you have seen your photograph? Are you tempted to be offended, and to accuse the minister of personal preaching? What are you then but backsliders in heart? Ye have fastened the brand upon yourselves. Ye are fallen. And do not, I beseech you, imagine that in the downward course you have commenced, you can absolutely stay yourselves at will. There is a self-accelerating power in sin, of which I charge you to beware. Your position is bad enough, full enough of peril and of guiltiness now; but a lower depth yawns for you, and you have neither safeguard nor secure footing. Once harbour the young serpent in your bosom, warm it when benumbed in your embrace, and the first act of its recovered life will be to sting the bosom that has warmed it. Dally in the tiger's path, lost in admiration of the sleek and glossy beauty of his skin, the fire will soon flash from his eyes as he crouches for the fatal spring. You sail pleasantly and swiftly on the waters, conscious only of a slightly perceptible increase in your speed. Ah! you are in the

eddy of the maelstrom; without remorse or resting, it hurls you round in its mad sport of death—

> "Oh, many a bark to that breast grappled fast,
> Has gone down to a fearful and fathomless grave;
> Again crashed together the keel and the mast,
> To be seen, tossed aloft, in the glee of the wave."

Brethren, I bid you beware, the minor apostasy prepares the way for the greater; the restraints of conscience once violated, the gap grows wider and wider; easy is the descent to perdition, and you are speeding thither; your only safety is in a renewed application to the Saviour, who has promised to heal your backslidings and to love you freely. There are some of the fallen who have gone further already in their apostasy. They have positively and publicly fallen. They have forsaken the sanctuary and the communion of the faithful. They have wandered off into far-off regions and a desert home. They ridicule the faith they once enjoyed, and blaspheme the holy name wherewith they were called. They have imbibed the thirst for drink, join in the drunkard's revel, and are speeding to the drunkard's grave. They make a mock at sin, leer at religion as if it were a detected imposture, and draw their ribald jests from the pages of the Holy Bible. Some of them have become apostles of infidelity, and are travelling through the world with the brand of Cain upon their brow, trying to lash around others the fetters of their own slavery, and to go well-companioned to the dungeons of their own hell. Thus far, alas! have many poor wanderers gone—backsliders. Have you seen them, haggard and disconsolate, taking the heart's faded flowers to wreathe

a ghastly smile, curling the lip disdainfully, and tossing the head to convince you that they do not feel, while their soul is a very Etna, smouldering with consuming fire? Can these be they who once promised fair for heaven—What! that outcast starveling, that plague-swept and famine-stricken prodigal!—he the heir of a princely heritage? Yes, it is true; and the long-suffering Father at this moment waits to own and kiss his late-returning son.



V.

THE BELIEVER'S SONSHIP.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." —1 JOHN iii. 2, 3.

IT is a law of our nature, or rather of our mental constitution, that in looking at any particular truth or subject, we unconsciously present it in that aspect which strikes ourselves the most forcibly, or which is the most congenial to our own minds. A doctrine may be presented before a dozen individuals, and each may have a just appreciation of it in its entirety, while as a matter of contemplation or attachment it will appear to each in very different phases, regulated to every one by the bent of his own desire. It is mercifully ordered that, with substantial unity of sentiment, there should be allowed this latitude in the personal consciousness of men. Take, for example, the heaven of the believer's hope and prospect. While the object of expectation has been one to the universal church, the features of that object have been various as in the glass of the kaleidoscope, and individuals have dwelt for their comfort upon the different aspects of its blessedness, according to their own felt need, or

yearning sorrow. Thus it is said of Wilberforce, whose life was one sunny activity of benevolence, unbroken by the wearing languors of the sick-bed, that when he thought of heaven, it was as a place which refined and sublimated every righteous affection—that his central idea was love; while the suffering Robert Hall, whose life was a torturing illness, and his brow beaded ever with the sweat of pain, murmured in his acutest paroxysms of the promised recompense of *rest*. This remark applies somewhat to the styles of the writers of the Bible, and affects the matter of the communications which they severally unfold to us; and from the incidental glimpses which we obtain of individual character, we are not surprised to find Paul a willing captive to the intellectual sublimity of the gospel, and its masterly advocate against the baffled schools; to find Peter combining the faithful and tender reproof of the erring, with the bold, almost scornful, denunciations of the perverse and proud; to find the judicious James insisting upon practical duty, and warning against unfruitful faith; and to find John, the beloved of them all, declaring the gospel of love, warming every precept with its genial inspiration, and exhorting the whole body of the faithful to its cultivation and to its spread. In the former chapter, he has shown that knowledge of Christ and union with Christ produce as their necessary fruit, obedience to the whole law, and affection towards the whole brotherhood of the faithful; and he then directs to the right regulation of this emotion of love, tells them that it should flow out in gratitude and service to God the Creator, and in tenderness and pity towards man the

fellow, but that it should hold itself loosely from the world, because it is a transitory thing—it and the lust of it are rapidly passing away—and that it should put all errors away from its embrace, because they are irreconcileable with that heavenly truth, in which (and not in iniquity) it is their duty to rejoice. Then, in the commencement of this chapter, he soars, enraptured, into the contemplation of the believer's privileges; declares that the humblest Christian, though the world flout him with its mockery, and frown him from its fellowships, is the heir of a diviner adoption—a minor now, but to inherit a kingdom by and by—a neophyte now, but to have afterwards a present world at his instalment as a royal priest unto God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." There is in these words a rich mine of comforting truth, which will well repay us for endeavouring to explore it, for it brings before us—

I. *The believer's present relationship.*
II. *A glimpse of his future.*

I. At the first reading of this marvellous declaration, we are almost startled into the inquiry, Is it our race and nature which are so highly honoured? Can it possibly be man, so frail and so erring, so often yielding to the tyranny of circumstance, so often impelled helplessly by his own frantic passion, so earth-bound in his pursuits, so seldom breaking away from

his trammels into the kindred of the upper air—is it he to whom you speak of a divine sonship? is it he whom you serve with an investiture into heaven's full and filial privileges? Who that looks upon man in his estrangement, in his stubbornness of enmity, in his audacious ingenuities of rebellion against God, can help the feeling that for him to be exalted into so rare a blessedness, is an exhibition of loving-kindness that is beyond compare—a marvel of condescending grace which passes all human wonder? There is something in the words, as the apostle utters them, which you at once feel to imply something more than that common and natural fatherhood which God sustains to all men. In one sense he is the Father of all earth's scattered tribes. There were no distinct aboriginal nations who sprang into being otherwise than by his creative word. He made of one blood all nations, however subsequently chequered by the influences of climate or of species. The apostle vindicates the Gentile claim to be considered as of the family. "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting." Heathen poets could sing, "For we are also his offspring;" and in acknowledgment of his relation to his creatures, as well as of his modes of essential existence, revelation has presented him endearingly as "God the Father." Of this general fatherhood you are all partakers. It is the heritage of man as man. It is a blessing native to you, conferred without your volition, like physical life, encompassing you, when you are reckless of it, as

the vital air—not at all dependent upon individual character, but a necessary adjunct of your creaturely condition. You are children of God, because he breathed the life into you, and in him you have your being. There are some who abuse this truth of God's universal fatherliness, to the ignoring of his punitive justice, and therefore to the dishonour of his name. They talk loosely of his great compassion, they profess a sentimental admiration of his benevolence, and imagine that to a Being so kind, punishment must of necessity be cruelty. Hence, forgetful that "a God all mercy were a God unjust," they weave plausible theories, in which he is represented as receiving all men to his bosom, either by an act of indiscriminate forgiveness, or after, at most, a brief and clement expiation of punishment. Brethren, has this delusive hope a lodgment in any of you? Are you basing your confidence upon the Father's kindness, while you are indifferent to the Father's honour? I would fain be earnest in repetition, and bold in rebuke of so blasphemous an error. I tell you it is not true. That hope of yours is a false one, and will perish. It rests upon an improper notion that sin is a little thing, whereas it is really an evil of appalling foulness. A rebel people could not make Moses quail; but, in the vision of their moral danger, he shuddered like a frightened child, and prayed—whatever may be the meaning of the fearful prayer—that his own name might be blotted out of the book which God had written. David was fearless before Goliath's massive spear and triple mail, but "horror took hold on him," shook him in its grasp, when he thought of the wicked

that had forsaken God's law. Jeremiah was plaintive ever, but there was a deeper sting in his sadness, when he "wept in secret places because of the people's pride." Paul had a heart of dauntless proof. He stood calm amid frowning billows, heroic amid frowning kings; he wore fetters as jewellery, and ventured without blanching "into the mouth of the lion." But the strong man bowed himself, and the fountains of the great deep of his soul were broken up, when he dwelt upon the sinner's danger—"Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Nay, their destitution and their doom drew tears from diviner eyes than his, for "when HE came near and beheld the city, he wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Surely, with these examples before us, it becomes us not to think lightly or indifferently of sin, or to imagine that a thing so reprobated will be cancelled with a look, like some childish mischief or folly of idle words. No! God is angry with the wicked every day. He will by no means clear the guilty without a satisfaction, an equivalent, a reason; and to say that the Father will forgive simply on account of his fatherhood, is to abstract from God's perfection of character, to reduce human character to a mythic and conventional distinction, to abolish the difference between right and wrong, to rob the Christian of his security for the fulfilment of the promises,

and to reproduce, in all its enormity, the old original *lie* which tempted Adam out of Paradise, and made Paradise itself only the memory of a beauteous dream.

I warn you very faithfully, if all you rest upon for participation in the promise of the text, is your inheritance of God's natural fatherhood, that you have neither part nor lot in the matter. Children you may be, but you are children wayward and prodigal—starvelings in a far country, with the husks and perhaps the habits of the swine—and so long as there has come upon you no transforming energy, so long as there has spoken to you no reconciling word, God looks upon you not with complacency, but with displeasure; and, robbed of his accustomed reverence by your evil deeds, he grieves to utter his complaint—"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?"

It is manifest, then, that when the apostle speaks to believers as the "sons of God," he has a reference to some exclusive privilege which has come to them, other than by natural descent or personal worthiness; and you do not need to be reminded that he regards them as being "reconciled unto God by the death of his Son." There is an evident reference to a change which has taken place in them, from alienation to friendship, from condemnation to acceptance, from a state of radical and sinful estrangement, to a state of wishful waiting upon God. The apostle refers to the love which alone has originated and carried out the

great scheme of redemption, which has harmonized every contrariety, which has made individual salvation possible in every case on certain and easy terms, and which has not merely freed from the apprehension of penalty, but has loaded with honour, and "caught up a slave to inherit a crown;" and, in the ecstasy of his contemplation, he summons the whole world to gaze with him upon the glorious vision: "Behold! what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." This is therefore not a natural nor hereditary, but an imparted sonship—not of right, but of *adoption*. These sons of God are "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." You have seen sometimes a heart smitten on account of sin, the life shadowed by the condemning bitterness, the sense of guilt and wrath making all creation dismal; no beauty in the landscape, because no beauty in the soul; no music in creation, because the heart's harp has got a broken string—the spirit panting only to be delivered from the burden which hung about it like a very body of death; and, perhaps, it has been in your experience to be present when such an one has exchanged tears for triumph, and sighs for songs, when the haggard cheeks have blushed as with the hues of Sharon's rose, when the healing sun has impearled the teardrops as they glistened still upon the eyelid; and when, from the lips, late mute or sobbing, there rose the full-voiced anthem of the converted sinner. The change has been palpable even to the bystanders. The most thoughtless have observed it in the sparkle of the eye; and those who have opportunities of judgment will attest its

genuineness from the improvement in the life. This change is both relative and real. The man has been penitent; he has groaned by reason of the disquietude of his spirit; he has bowed himself in godly sorrow; he has toiled up the way somewhat ascending to the foot of the cross; with the agony and grip of the drowning clutching the last chance for life, he has reposed his trust on Jesus, and, "being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In that blest moment he receives a whole cluster of blessing. The Judge justifies the prisoner, the Monarch pardons the rebel, the Father adopts the son, and the Divine Spirit, sent from on high to witness to the fact of his adoption, works in that same instant the regeneration of the nature, creates the clean heart and the right spirit; and the man rises in the newness of a holier life—no rebel, no criminal, not even a servant who discharges duty at the bidding of fear—but a son who, with cheerful alacrity, leaps on his obedient way, and thrills with eagerness to do his new-found Father's will. It is in the possession of this privilege, consciously realized, that the apostle says to those of like experience, whose hearts would vibrate to his own in throbs of unison, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Who shall estimate the preciousness of this rare and hallowed privilege? Where, amongst the records of human history, or in the long experience of years, shall condescension like this find parallel? We have read of warriors who have been merciful in the moment of triumph, and who have spared lives which had been forfeited by repeated treacheries; there were magnanimous hearts beating beneath the intrepid breasts of old,

a stern chivalry restrained the mad passion of the knights of song and story, and poets have sung to the applauding world of the bridal between tenderness and courage: but never could human charity compass so large a self-sacrifice as this, to take a perfidious captive, a traitor to every obligation, stained with the heart's blood of the nearest and dearest, and instal him in the family, and give him the household welcome and the children's bread; but "God commendeth *his* love toward us," not merely that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," but "that we might receive the adoption of sons."

If you consider all that is scripturally involved in this great blessing of adoption, it will tend to augment your gratitude and wonder. The apostle pursues the argument into a still higher domain of privilege: "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The plain statements of the Bible transcend the loftiest hyperboles of human speech—*joint*-heirs—the law of primogeniture superseded, no inequality of division: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down:" "Enter into the joy of thy Lord:" "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Oh, here is the august and stately splendour of Christian bestowment, "that we should be called the sons of God!" It is something to pay the debt of the prisoner, to strike the fetters from his chafed limbs, to open for him the doors of the dungeon, and to let the air of heaven kiss his brows again, and purify him from the very smell of bondage. That were in itself a

precious benefit, to remove the guilt and condemnation from the heart of the bowed debtor, and to set him free. And yet in many instances freedom were but a partial boon. Suppose the man friendless and poor, sensitive to "the rich man's scorn, the proud man's contumely, and the spurns which patient merit from the unworthy takes," unable to hold his own among the buffet and battle of the world; by his deliverance you banish him from the place, where, though in thraldom, he was housed and fed, and turn him helpless upon men's cruel pity or still more cruel wrong. Still, you say, the man is free, he is in no man's power, he has the great and common birthright of his race. This is true, and it is a grand thing to give him freedom; but it were a grander thing surely to translate him from the prison-house to the palace, to lift him from ruin to royalty, to screen him from the inclement blasts of an unequal sky, to provide for him and watch over him as a child. Hence it seems as if God, in his boundlessness of compassion, felt that salvation, considered simply as the deliverance from the curse of the law, were only a partial exhibition of divine tenderness; and so he conferred upon the ransomed one the adoption of sonship, as at once the rarest mark of condescension, and the most magnificent illustration of love. Indeed, there can be no higher. Here all experiments of blessing terminate, and all scattered rays of love converge. Earth and heaven in this are drained of their greatest riches. Grace itself is exhausted, and the fulness of the Father's heart is poured out here; the most gorgeous visions of wealth and privilege that pen can trace, or pencil sketch, or words syllable, are poor to this; and

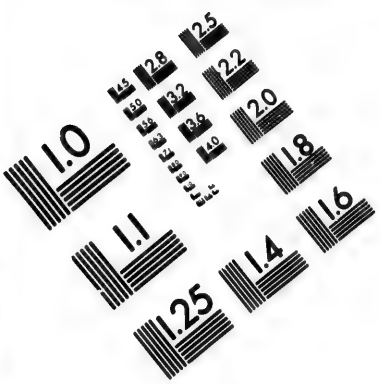
all the thick-coming fancies of the poet's brain, even when imagination has dowried him the most superbly, dwindle before the glory of this simple fact, that we—ignorant, frail, erring, mortal—that *we* "should be called the sons of God." Brethren, this privilege may be yours. God will confer it upon every penitent heart of you, if you will seek it at his hands. The Spirit waits to bestow it, and you may enter into its enjoyment now.

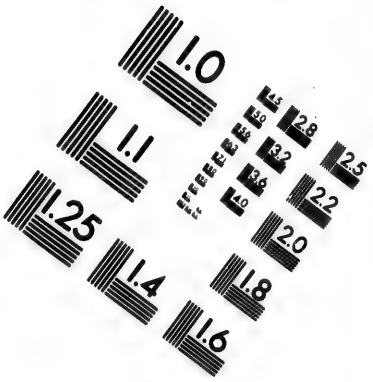
II. The text gives us a glimpse, and but a glimpse, of the believer's future: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." There is a general uncertainty, redeemed by a particular assurance. We may not be able to understand with definiteness the blessed conditions of our future existence, but of one fact, and that the highest, we are sure: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." It was not the purpose of God to reveal fully to us "the recompense of reward," either of delight or doom. We have hints rather than tidings, glimpses rather than visions. There is enough to guide us to a general knowledge of the nature of the retribution which awaits us, and to impress us with sanctions which appeal to our hope and to our fear; but there is not enough to overweigh our moral freedom, nor to interfere with our exercise of faith, nor in any wise to neutralize the purposes of our probationary trial. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God hath hidden from us the excellent

glory—the ocean fulness of the believer's eternal privilege is beyond the ken of reason—and stretches on through the everlasting years, an expanse too vast for mortal eye to scan, and too deep for mortal plummet to sound. We may not complain of this—that the inheritance is not at once explored by us now in the time of our infancy—that there shall be sweet surprises in the sky—that we neither know nor feel now with the knowledge and with the feeling of the hereafter. Our gratitude should repress our curiosity. The very fact that it is an inheritance should silence us when our desire would fain pierce the invisible, and babble of its wondrous secrets. If the reward were of debt and not of grace, we might demand a more accurate acquaintance with our own property; but it is of unmerited favour, that we are permitted to anticipate a heaven at all. There are some men who lord it over broad lands which their own swords have won, or which they have purchased with the wealth which they have gotten by the sweat of brow or brain; but there are others who leap at once into patrimonial acres and into revenues amassed by some grim ancestor of a forgotten former time, or who wear coronets because in their veins there runs the blood—after all, no redder than a churl's—which they have drawn from the Plantagenets or Howards. These last are the types of us, in our possession of every spiritual blessing. We inherit them by God's great adopting love; and each one ransomed spirit in the heaven, even the sweetest-harped and loftiest-throned, will reverently sing, "We got not this place in possession by our own hand, neither did our own arm save us; but thy right hand, and thine

arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us." But while the revelations of the future are to disclose the details of the believer's happiness, on one point the apostle expresses himself as perfectly certain now: "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." This is not the language of hesitation, nor even of conjecture, but of firm and well-warranted conviction. And he had reason for the assurance which he so confidently expresses; for to have that mind that was in Christ Jesus, was the highest apostolic ambition; and that men might learn his lowliness and embrace his yoke, was one of the purposes for which Christ came into the world. Brethren, here is the highest object of Christian attainment—to be like Christ; here is something more enrapturing to the renewed soul than monarchy or minstrelsy of heaven; that is, the disposition of heart which will fit the king to beseem himself with dignity, and the harper to discourse music worthy of his fellows in the choir. Christ did "leave us an example that we should follow in his steps," and it becomes us, like the Psalmist, to "set the Lord always before us."

The aspirant after excellence in any particular pursuit strives to imitate the selectest models. The young sculptor would fain wield a Phidias' mallet. The artist follows reverently the history of Raffaelle or Angelo; or, placing before him some hero of his heart's idolatry, longs to be the Apelles to paint his especial Alexander. There are few of us who have not lived imitative lives, and longed to be like such an one who in one or other department had excelled his





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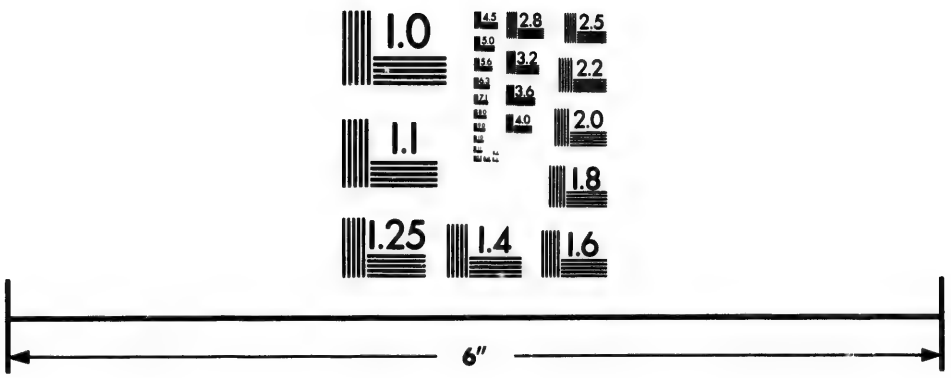

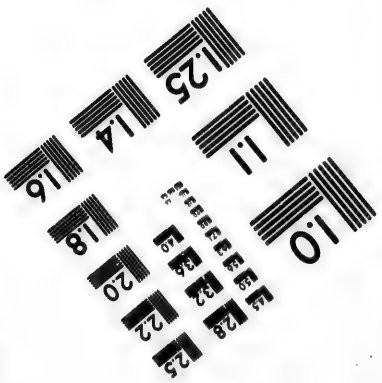

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fellows. But all human models are imperfect; and so perverse. moreover, is the nature we inherit, that we are fain to reproduce rather the weaknesses of great men than their strengths. The same infirmity besets us in our aspirations after Christ-likeness; but our model here is complete and is Divine. In that all-perfect humanity, never divorced from the Divinity which it enshrined, but shining upon us nevertheless with its individual glory, there was neither weakness nor blemish; there is a perfect human nature which no guilt, either transmitted or personal, had ever stained. But though to aspire after that model is the believer's life-work, and he is bent, with a purpose which never falters, upon growing up into that likeness, there are rebel elements at work within him, and "hindrances strew all the way."

Those of you who have a spiritual history, who have learned to battle with these evil forces which once held you in thrall, and which are loth to relinquish the lordship over you which they have almost claimed by prescription, and which they have held for years—you can understand the difficulties of the soul's upward progress—you can tell of years of struggle, with sometimes triumphant and sometimes only doubtful mastery, of seasons of alternate depression and gladness, of fierce temptations, to resist which has required your utmost manhood and Divine help withal, and which have left you bathed in the sweat of very physical exhaustion, as if overtasked by the drudgery of labour. You know how the inbred depravity has doggedly fought with you at every footstep—how, when beaten, it has retreated fighting—how the old man, as Bunyan

hath it, has given you a gripe which almost strangled you, when you thought him paralyzed in the last gasp of age. The Christ-likeness, believe me, is not drawn upon the soul in a moment—taken, like a photograph, by a flash of the sun. By the regeneration of the Holy Ghost the nature is renewed, I know, and the man is started fairly upon his new and noble work; but the precision and detail of the likeness, like the finished picture of the artist, are the labour of thoughtful and toiling years. Through many failures—through dreads—of hypocrisy, of indifference, of shortcoming, of worldly-mindedness—seizing upon the spirit and shaking it like a spiritual ague—through hurricane blasts of passion, and frequent rain of tears—through baptisms fierce as of fire, and exhausting as of blood—through the toil up new Calvaries, and the passing through strange agonies, which, in their measure and in far-off and reverent distance, may be called the soul's Gethsemanes—through all these must the believer press into "that mind which was in Christ Jesus," and even at the close of an existence, during which he has never lost sight of the purpose which came into him at the time of his conversion, he may feel that he has exhibited but an imperfect copy of his glorious Pattern.

But oh! the promise stands comforting and sure—and I speak it for those of you who know what conflict is, and who need to be encouraged in your hallowed war—by and by the soul's ambition will be realized, by and by the Spirit will be baffled and thwarted no longer, by and by his presence will burst upon us; and when we see him it will be a transforming

vision: "we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Rejoice not over us, ye our enemies, when the sword flies out of our hand, and we are apparently worsted in the fight! Triumph not over our decrepitude too soon. There is a time coming when we shall have breasted the last wave of trial, shuddered at the last tramp of demon, groaned beneath the last wrench of sin, gazed upon the corpse of the last destroyed enemy; for Christ hath risen, and lives! and "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Brethren, if you are in Christ to-day, it is yours to delight yourselves in the contemplation of your coming privilege. To be like Christ, fully and without a drawback to reflect his image, this is the destiny of your ransomed nature. In this world we hope to follow our pattern, to remind others somewhat of the Saviour with whom we have companioned, to cause men to say of us when they see our strife after holy living, "He has been with Jesus;" but yonder, if we be faithful unto death, we shall receive this, the highest and most enrapturing crown of life, perfect assimilation to our Lord. To us now, with the scales of mortality upon our vision, and its faintness ever lurking about our hearts, the thought is overwhelming. Summoned, as were the chosen, to the Mount of Transfiguration, we should "fear," as they did, "to enter into the cloud;" but not only will *he* be transfigured, and appear with the veil of humanity dropped, in all the glory of the essentially Divine, but we too shall have a transfiguration. Ours will be the Tabor-experience as well as the Tabor-communion; the fashion

of our countenance shall be changed; there shall be a human nature, not scarred and fallen, but erect and beauteous as in the ancient Eden; the mind, no longer error-stricken, shall exult in the white light of Truth, unwarped by any medium that would distemper its rays; the soul, freed from its bondage of evil habits, and from the tyranny of an evil heart of unbelief, shall gratefully realize its purity, and find in God its heaven; and the whole man at length, through redeeming grace, shall fulfil the end of his creation, and there shall be a peopled recompense, in which Jehovah shall look round upon a family gathered out of this lost world of ours—a family without a rebel and without a prodigal—and every happy spirit reflecting his own image, made like him; "for we shall see him as he is."

VI.

THE EMPTY SEPULCHRE.

"And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."—LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

THE love with which the Saviour had inspired his disciples, and especially those leal-hearted women who followed him, was not quenched by the many waters of his passion and death. Cherished hopes had been cruelly blighted, schemes of personal aggrandisement had been proved of impossible fulfilment. The cross was a marvellous mortifier of ambition; the tomb might well have become the sepulchre of faith; and those bewildered ones, who had failed to penetrate the real glorification of the Messiah, might be excused if they declined to follow him now that the grave had closed upon his body. But the strong affections of those loving hearts prevailed over the scanty faith of those perplexed understandings, and though there hardly lurked perhaps in any heart the hope of resurrection—though they spoke of their faith in the past tense, and had interred in that "sepulchre hewn out of a rock" each patriotic hope and personal dream of freedom—their love burned in their hearts, tinged their whole history with a melancholy sadness,

and drew their charmed footsteps very early in the morning to the place where Jesus lay. You can fancy their wonder when, laden with the spices and ointments with which the loving work of embalmment was to be done, they came to the sepulchre on the morning of the third day; and, instead of the massive stone, imperial seal, pomp of soldiery, and all the other imposing attestations to his burial, beheld a vacant neighbourhood, a removed barrier, a disused shroud, a forsaken tomb, and "a vision of angels which said that he was alive." With what eager recollection would they urge themselves to recall all that he had said while he was yet with them; how many enigmas which had baffled them would this wondrous event interpret; with what intensity of affection would they cling to the risen Saviour; and how diligently would they set themselves to be more fully instructed in his purpose, and to be more fitting instruments for the work which he had chosen them to do!

Brethren, I want you to accompany me this morning, that we may together journey to behold the place where they laid him. You climbed with me the holy mount, and watched him, awed and wondering, as he entered into the cloud; we thought together upon his soul, now troubled with the darkening of the sorrow; we heard his last public discourse. Let us now go to the grave to weep and worship there. Nay, be not affrighted. It is no place of skulls. No hideous images of death surround, no horrors of the discovered charnel, "no festering limb and rotting bone, in dire confusion tossed." We wend our way amid the foliage and the flowers; it is but a Sabbath

stroll into a garden in the spring. And if through our tears we grope wilderingly for the sight of the body, the rebuking angels speak to us in the words of the text: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

It will be well, perhaps, in the first place, to remind ourselves of the *evidences*, and then of the *purposes*, of the resurrection of Christ. The necessity that the resurrection should be fenced round with impregnable evidence will be manifest, if you consider the place which it occupies among the massive facts upon which the Christian system is founded, and the prominence which is uniformly ascribed to it by the inspired writers: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." And in this age of daring and rash thought, when speculators rush into regions which they were never chartered to tread, and when men, with seeming modesty and deprecating humbleness, dig about the foundations of Christian truth—if haply they may be undermined—there is the greater reason that we should mark well the bulwarks of Truth, and consider her palaces, that we may tell it to the generation following. They who deny the reality of miracles, and speak—some flippantly, some strongly—upon their being matters rather for derision than for argument, would do well to remember that their denial is in fact an absolute denial of Christianity; for the resurrection of Christ is the greatest and sublimest of his miracles, and if this be disproved, the faith of all believers is vain. It is impossible, of course, to strike out new sources of evidences in proof of this historical fact; or, if the ingenuity of mind should essay to do so,

they would lack of necessity some of the strength and venerableness which are connected with the "pillar and ground" of the former time. The vintage might be extensively advertised and critically praised, but it would lack the ancient aroma, and "no man having tasted the old wine, would straightway desire the new, for he would say the old is better." There are what may be called external and internal lines of proof.

The resurrection involves the reality of the death, and this is a fact which in ancient times was never doubted, and which it was reserved for the infidelity of the moderns, driven from every other vantage ground, to assail. A million and a half of people saw him die; the Roman governor judicially affirmed him to be dead; the blood and water issuing from the spear-wound, and showing that both the pericardium and the heart had been pierced, demonstrated his death. The soldiers, when in their barbarous mercy they brake the legs of the malefactors who were crucified with him, "when they saw that he was already dead" —not that he had swooned from the excruciating suffering, but that life had actually departed—"when they saw that he was already dead, brake not *his* legs." It is an established fact that, in the days of Pontius Pilate, Jesus of Nazareth did actually die.

It is a fact also of importance in this deepening series, that Christ was buried. Interment was not often granted to crucified criminals, but in this case Providence overruled the sordid in Pilate, and the cautious in the Scribes and Pharisees, to multiply the witnesses of the resurrection. Joseph of Arimathæa, a rich and honourable man, "went in boldly unto Pilate, and

begged the body of Jesus," and with decent observance, and with customary respect, they laid him in the grave. There was no pomp of sables nor mockery of nodding plumes, no hired mourners wailed in the cold traffic of unfelt sorrow, but heart-mourners wept at his burial, and the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre was rolled there by regretful hands. Do you think it suspicious that these offices should have been performed by those who were followers of Jesus, and foolish of the governor to have given up the body? The scribes and priests of old seem to have thought with you on this matter; and, to prevent either spoliation or jugglery, they demanded and obtained the imperial seal upon the stone, and a troop of watching soldiers. Now remember that the sepulchre was a cave hewn out of a rock, whose granite ribs defied the sapper's power. There was no aperture out of which the body could be surreptitiously conveyed; the only possible entrance was by the rolling away of the stone. It is by no means an unimportant fact, that there is no doubt about the Saviour's burial.

Another fact patent to all the world, which the exultations of Christ's friends and the dismay of his enemies alike combined to testify, was that the sepulchre was empty on the third day. The women who were the earliest visitors went wondering to tell the disciples it was empty. The soldiers who had been sent to guard it went wondering to the priests who had hired them with the tidings. There were the clothes and the spices, but there was no body. The sepulchre was indubitably empty on the third day. Then comes the question, How came the sepulchre to

be empty? There have only been two theories put forth in answer to this question. The rulers said the body was stolen; the apostles said the body had risen. No third solution has ever been tried to solve the problem of the empty sepulchre. Then let us examine for a moment the Jewish account of the matter. If the body was stolen, either the friends or the enemies of Christ must have committed the astounding felony. It is manifest on the face of it, that the enemies of Christ had no motive but to secure its retention in the grave; or that if they had had it in possession, they might at once have produced it, and so covered the Redeemer's cause with the ignominy of detected imposture. They therefore were not the perpetrators nor the abettors of the deed. Then the friends of Jesus—his disciples—must have been the doers of the wrong; and "this saying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day."

I would have you consider the cumulative improbability which gathers around such a supposition. Men of brave hearts might have planned such a daring adventure; but the disciples were cowards in his lifetime, when he was at hand for their rescue, quailed and stammered when they were taxed with being his followers, and, on the first symptom of danger, with one accord forsook him and fled. Men of true faith might have risked something to realize a brilliant dream; but the disciples' faith died with the Master—scarcely a hope lingered in their minds that they would ever behold him again, and they were but half assured as to the truth which he had chosen them to deliver. Men of strong arm might, in the hardihood

of desperation, have assaulted a superior and well-disciplined enemy, five times their number; but timid fishermen, who had no faith in their own cause, would as soon have dared a general rebellion, as have attacked a force ordered specially to watch against their coming, and composed of bronzed veterans scarred with the wounds of many a fierce campaign. Besides, look at the palpable absurdity of the soldiers' story: "His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." This marvellous deed was done, if done at all, by twelve men against sixty—done when all Jerusalem was filled with the excitement of the story—done when the moon shone brilliantly through a cloudless oriental sky—done at the season of the Passover, when the streets were thronged all night; and though the strict discipline of Roman military law adjudged death as the deserved penalty of a sentinel's slumber at his post, we are required to believe that this inexorable drowsiness settled on this night upon the whole troop, that they sank into a slumber so opportune and so sound, that no rolling of the stone, nor disciples' stealthy tread, nor earthquake's shock, awoke them; and that the disciples had calculated their chances so admirably, that at this period of simultaneous and convenient coma they accomplished their purpose, and carried off the body. The lie is too transparent to deceive even the most credulous Hebrew, and the very clumsiness of the apology sets in clearer light the grandeur of the truth. Then if you consider the manner in which the witnesses gave their testimony, you will feel conviction kindle into certainty. To attest the sincerity of the testifiers, as well as the

verity of their witness, you have but to look at time, and place, and motive. Impostors travel into spots remote, wait until distance of time seek revenue of gain or power as the results of their perseverance in falsehood. But the apostles affirmed the resurrection, when the tale yet thrilled the city's heart and made it beat with faster pulses, or of hope or anger; they said it in the public places of resort where the sufferer's feet had trodden. In the synagogues where he had taught, in the hall where he had been scourged, on the mount where he had met his fate, in the scenes all haunted by the ghostly thoughts of the murder, and in the very teeth of the cowed and craven murderers, did the apostles affirm that Jesus which was crucified had risen from the dead. No other testimony did they ever bear, though the bearing drove patronage and affluence away from them, and introduced them to bonds and penury, and brought not a few of them into the stern presence of Death. Men do not lie without a motive, and the unwillingness with which they were slow of heart to believe what they afterwards so fearlessly proclaimed, forbids all suspicion of self-deceived enthusiasm; and our faith may rest upon the testimony of those honest witnesses, in the assurance of the risen Saviour and of the defeated and deserted grave.

The internal evidences, equally convincing, we may not do more than intimate to-day. We might mention the existence and spread of persecution for this testimony, as an assuring declaration that the witnesses must be beaten not by proof, but by power—for when the sword is invoked, it is quite evident that the tongue and pen

have failed. The fettered limbs and shattered bodies of the apostles were a manifestation of the life of Jesus, convincing as to the freedom of the witnesses both from corruption and enthusiasm; for torture will soon wring confession out of villany, and there are limits which enthusiasm cannot pass. We might mention, too—and it is worthy of a more enlarged consideration than our time allows us to give to it—that the supports and consolations afforded to the apostles, and to all believers since their day, solely in Jesu's name, are demonstrative testimonies that Jesus is alive. All history, both profane and sacred, affirms that the apostles were singularly sustained. They bore indignities with calmness, smiled in the face of angry and bigoted adversaries, walked to meet grim death without a murmur, and blenched not when the cross was reared, nor when the headsman's axe glittered in sympathy with the revengeful eyes which clamoured that it should fall. Now, as the truth for which they testified was the truth that Jesus was alive, as this was the burden of their witness, and as Divine consolations were given to sustain them in their utterance of this, we are justified in saying that there was the Divine testimony added to the human, and that those martyred champions "bore about in their bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in their mortal flesh." Enough has been advanced, I am persuaded, to convince you that when our hopes exult around the empty sepulchre, we are not rejoicing without reason, nor basing our confidence upon some cunning fable or delusive dream, but that we are right when we address our prayers to Jesus as

a living Saviour, and fasten our eternal trust upon him who, "dying once, dieth now no more."

II. It will profit us, after this authentication of our faith in the Resurrection of Christ, to meditate upon some of the purposes which it was intended to fulfil; and at present I wish to fix your thoughts only upon the three following thoughts:—It may be regarded as *an attestation, a seal, and an earnest.* Take the first thought. It was a fulfilment of the words of Scripture and of Christ himself, and therefore vindicated both the verity of prophecy and the personal character of the Messiah. The reference to the *Word,* as necessitating the Resurrection, is frequent in the history of the Saviour's ministry. "So must the Scripture be fulfilled," was a not unusual utterance of his life. Among those holy men before whom God had sketched in glowing vision the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, while yet the reality slumbered through viewless centuries of years, there were predictions which plainly foretold that on the third day he should rise from the dead. The announcement that he should make his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, was minutely fulfilled in the circumstances of his burial, and in his transfer from the place of skulls to the garden. The remarkable passage in the sixteenth Psalm, with St. Peter's comment upon it in the thirteenth of Acts, is conclusive proof of the light in which the apostles regarded the announcement that he should not see corruption. They deemed it a prediction that he should rise on the third day, for in those tropic latitudes the body could not longer be

preserved from putrefaction; hence the exclamation of Martha in reference to the brother whom she loved, "Lord! by this time he is corrupt; for he hath been dead four days." Our Lord also on two notable occasions suspended his own character on his resurrection. When the Pharisees asked for a sign—for they were a people covetous of wonders—Jesus referred them to that marvellous fact in their own prophetical history, when a prophet had been raised from the very strangest of tombs: "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Again, on another occasion he said, passing in rapidity of transition from the material temple to the costlier temple of his body, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." It was in these cases as if he had said, "If the grave becomes a prison to me, and not a temporary home of lodging—if the tomb which the decent care of my friends will secure me, apart from the common Golgotha, be not empty on the third day—write me down an impostor, and let there be a scattering upon the cause which I have so laboriously toiled to establish. If this body in which ye have seen me incarnate be never visible to you again—if ye see the last of it, some of you, as it is racked upon the cross, some of you as ye lay it with solemnity and sorrow in the grave—if I do not appear to you uttering my customary salutation, and convincing even the most incredulous amongst you by the scar and the print of the nail—then my name may be cast out as evil, and I may be numbered among the

false Christs and false prophets of whom I have so often warned you to beware." The predictions of Christ respecting his own death and Resurrection were prophecies as real and sacred as any which issued from the lips of ancient seers; and if they were falsified, utter ruin must have come upon his cause and fame. And yet this was the truth which the apostles most especially proclaimed—Jesus is risen. They sounded it in the startled hearing of the Jews, who marvelled at their boldness, and of the rulers, who tried to compass the silencing of the witness which they could not gainsay. "Do the rulers know indeed"—the murmur circulated widely among the observant peoples —"that this is the very Christ?" "Jesus is risen!" said the fervent Peter on that pentecostal field-day of the first Gospel-crusade, and to three thousand hearts the truth wended its straight and conquering way. "Jesus is risen!" proclaimed the preachers of the truth, whom persecution had scattered into many nations of the earth, and everywhere they found that they were proclaiming, not only a marvel, but a power. Jesus is risen! It is the clarion call of the highest inspirations yet; and when misgivings harass our faith, or insolent scepticisms assail our ancient trust, we may go visit the deserted sepulchre, and see graven on its scarp of rock as an attestation of the character, and an epitaph to the memory of the tenant that *once* was there, "Truly he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead."

Again, the Resurrection of Christ was the *seal* of the acceptance of his sacrifice, and, by consequence, of infinite moment to confirm the hopes of the world.

The purpose of the incarnation—that to which all others were subsidiary—was the death of Christ, as a substitute for the sins of the world. We are not going to loosen our faith from this ancient anchorage, although there be flapping in the sails of the vessel, and evil spirits whistle up a breeze. "We preach Christ crucified, the power and the wisdom of God." The world is represented as being under the dominion of death, and of him that had the power of death; and to bruise that power in its head, and to rescue from that strong man armed, and bind him and spoil his goods, and to abolish death by death, and to bring the long-hidden secrets of life and immortality to light, were the designs for which Messiah came. All that was required to constitute a valid substitute—freedom from hereditary or from personal taint, and supremacy over the law which had been violated by his clients—met in the person of Jesus. All that was required to constitute a perfect sacrifice—willinghood to suffer, capacity to bear the suffering, the endurance which blenched not from the curse and from the midnight, but was constant and heroic to the end—all met in the offering of Jesus. And when the last groan was wrung from the victim, and the last cross-message spoken, and the last mighty litany uprose with its majestic mercy, he said, "It is finished," and he died.

The interval between the death and resurrection, though crowded with important incident, and not for a moment regarded anxiously in heaven, where they knew the end from the beginning, was to wondering hearts on earth a season of palpitating haste, and strange, expectant, fluttering hope and fear. If there was a

time when suspense ever rested upon our destinies, it was then; and doubt might have been excused its questionings, and loving faith its wailing search for the living among the dead. Why abides that debtor in the dungeon, gazing moodily through the loopholes of his enforced retreat upon the sward, fresh carpeted with emerald in honour of the fair young spring? Because the law has claims upon him that are yet unfulfilled, and an inexorable creditor exacts the uttermost farthing. Why walks that debtor forth, ungyved and buoyant, exchanging greetings with his fellows upon equal terms, looking forth upon the sun with glances as free as are his own, moving among the fair fellowships of earth "with joy and with the certain step of man?" Because the demands of law are satisfied; the justice which imprisoned him, protects him; and in the conscious, common right of manhood unembarrassed and uncrimed, he can say "Hands off" to each intrusive touch upon the shoulder. So, while Christ was cribbed in the prisoning grave, it was a token to the world that the Surety was detained because the debt was yet unpaid; but when he rose, it was the symbol of the world's deliverance from the legal pain, and from the grasp of bondage. "He was raised again for our justification." Power to forgive sins accrued equitably from the weakness of the crucifixion, and from the humiliation of the grave. The stone was rolled away from the destiny, as well as from the sepulchre. The angel who sat upon it received his commission in that moment which John, in the glad apocalypse, saw him flying through the midst of heaven to fulfil. There, in the tomb, emblemed

by those clothes of death, the world's guilt and ruin lie; there, in the Christ risen and glorious, the world's hope and healing live. Do you wonder that that faith should be precious which trusts in the Resurrection of Jesus? do you wonder that we should keep Easter with such joyous hearts? do you wonder that apostles should break out exultingly, "It is Christ that died, yea, *rather* that is risen again"? or that, worthy to be linked with that soul-charming name, like a warrior's chiefest battle brought to mind always when men speak of him, we should preach "Jesus and the Resurrection" in the ears of ransomed sinners? Brethren, take its comfort to yourselves. Not inaptly, nor without a purpose, do the Easter and the spring-time come together. That first, fresh April blossoming of the woodland with its inimitable green of foliage, is bright type of the fortunes of the race, redeemed by Jesus from the long winter of triumphant Death. Let Nature, thus interpreted, repeat the consolation which Scripture loyally affirms: "Now is Christ risen from the dead."

"Is there a heart that loves the spring,
The witness can refuse;
Can mortals doubt, when angels bring
From heaven their Easter news?
When holy men and matrons speak
Of Christ's forsaken bed,
And voices high forbid to seek
The living 'mong the dead?"

Just a word upon the third thought. The Resurrection of Christ is the *earnest* of our own rising, the pledge of immortality to the race for whom he was the second Adam. The enforcement of our own resurrection as

resulting from the resurrection of Christ, forms, you remember, the staple argument in that magnificent chapter (1 Cor. xv.) which has become the chosen elegy of the church. The apostle there speaks of Christ as the first-fruits of immortality. True, there had been exceptional instances of resurrection before Christ—instances all of them of the prelusive exercise of *his* power—the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, and the saints which rose in brief visit to their kindred in the Holy City when the warders of the invisible world were stunned by the great shock of the Crucifixion. But all these died again, and the graves, which had been prematurely opened, received them in the fulness of their appointed times. Christ only "dieth no more;" and just as when the queenly moon comes forth, around her come her attendant stars, trooping one by one, and just as the first ears of corn were waved before the Lord in pledge that the great harvest of Palestine should be gathered, so, as we stand by the Saviour's vacant sepulchre, we may rejoice in the certainty that our own shall be vacant too, and that "because he lives, we," who believe in him, "shall live also." Mourner! believest thou this? Why go weeping to the grave, moaning with an inner sorrow so consuming that it has dried up the fountains of the tears? Your loved ones are not there. Why seek ye the living among the dead? If ye answer that 'tis human too, for

> "Love is not the soul's alone;
> It twines around the form we woo,
> The mortal we have known;"

still, the very form you clasped is not there—it is

slowly dying into the life of the glorified and spiritual body. We know not when the last trump shall sound, but it shall not be until each mortal is ready for the re-union with its own immortal in the sky. We have a personal interest each of us in the Resurrection of Christ; for when he comes in glory, he will bring our loved ones with him, if they sleep in Jesus; and it is a precious and irrefragable truth, that "he that believeth in" Jesus, "though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in" him "shall never die."

VII.

THE SANCTUARY.

'I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."—Ps. xlii. 4.

NONE who are now in the presence of God will deny that the natural state of man is not a state of safety, and that something is required adapted to the necessities of his nature, and bearing upon it the sanction of Divine authority, to make him happy each moment, and happy for ever.

By nature he is guilty, liable to the inflictions of a broken law, and he needs something which can deliver him from the penalty of transgression; by nature he is depraved, covered with debasing defilement, and he needs something which can purify his soul, and bring upon him the character of a child of Christ. And it is matter of thankfulness that this gift of incalculable mercy has been supplied. Diversified as are the wants of humanity, they are all provided for in the Gospel of the grace of God. Finding man oppressed with the apprehensions of the impending curse, it directs him to the Sacrifice by which he has been redeemed; finding him groaning beneath the leprosy of sin, it points him to the fountain where he may wash and be clean.

For the accomplishment of these ends, religion has established a certain order of means, beautifully exemplifying the Divine wisdom, and admirably adapted to human passions—that order of means being assisted and influenced by the Holy Spirit.

The ways in which God specially works upon the mind of man are twofold—by the powerful energy of the living ministry, and by the silent eloquence of the written Word. These are both recognised in Scripture as the agencies of Divine operation. The Psalmist tells us that "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;" and the apostle declares that when "the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And St. Paul, in his memorable Epistle to the Romans, appears to unite the two: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Brethren, it appears to us that these two instruments, thus potently ordained by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, should never be separated. We have authority to dispense with neither, nor should the one be needlessly exalted at the expense and to the detriment of the other.

If you have hearing, for instance, without reading, you lay the Church open to all the corruptions of Popery. You have priests, but you have no Bibles; you have a minister, but you have no Word of God to confront him. You take your teaching from the wisdom of man, and cast aside all the light and benefit of the Gospel. The spiritual welfare of the people is at the mercy of every capricious and fluctuating element of the minister's character; and you commit the keeping of your souls to one who, in as far as he

wanders from the Bible, is as blind and as ignorant and as helpless as yourselves.

Brethren, keep fast by your Bibles. Let not your faith come by hearing alone, but let your hearing be tried by the Word of God. Let it not be said that you are credulous, and believe everything you hear. Let not your religious convictions be the result of education or habit, or what prejudice or fancy may have suggested to your minister. Be the Bereans of the present day, and "search the Scriptures" for yourselves. We have no sympathy with those who would manacle the minds of the people, and make them crouch in blind subserviency to the behests of the minister. We execrate the arrogance which is the spirit of the cry, "Hear the church," in the perverted sense in which those words have been lately understood; and in contradiction, direct and unqualified, we say, "Hear *not* the church," except when the voice is agreeable to the Bible. Reverence your ministers indeed—"esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake"—regard them as God's delegated messengers—but "try their spirits whether they be of God." Bring them to the standard of Scripture. Salvation is too mighty a subject to be entrusted to another, however gifted or however powerful. The welfare of the soul demands supernatural attention. Be the Bible your guide then, for it is perfect, and the offspring of the Spirit of God.

Again, if you have reading without hearing, you throw away the benefit of a public ministry—an institution sanctioned by Christ, and transmitted in uninterrupted perpetuity to the present day. Although

we delight to think that scriptural knowledge is increasing, and that the majority of the people are in possession of the word of life, yet the day of universal illumination has not yet arrived. Ministers have still to do as they did in the days of Ezra—"read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and give the sense, and cause the people to understand the reading."

Moreover, there is a persuasion in tones of tenderness, there is an eloquence in fervent feeling, there is an urgency in forceful and pathetic exhortation, which the Spirit has used mightily to convince the consciences of men. From the pulpit it is the prerogative of a single man to make the truth bear with energy and effect upon the consciences of hundreds. The Spirit his helper, he enters upon his high vocation with a soul smitten with the love of the truth, and a mind fully fraught with the power of its arguments, and many and mighty have been the effects produced. He has taken an analysis of the human heart, and, while probing the deceitfulness of that den of iniquity, the sinner has quailed beneath his utterance. He has transfused his own feelings to the spirit of his hearers, and their eyes have sparkled, and their hearts have bounded when he has told them the tale of bleeding love; and if he has talked to them of the future, and the believer's recompense has occupied his thoughts, their countenances have glowed already with the glories of the heaven he has described. The man that speaks from the heart must speak *to* the heart, and the power of the living voice has been, in numberless instances, followed by the blessing of God.

We are then to dispense with neither instrument

of Divine operation, but the one must exercise a sanatory check upon the other. The Bible is the sword, the minister the hand that wields it, and the Spirit the omnipotent energy that gives it its keenness and its edge. The Bible is the "light unto our feet," the minister the watchman who lifts it up amidst the dismal darkness of the moral night, and the Spirit the influence that flashes it on men's consciences with irresistible evidence and force. The Bible is the arrow which pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, the minister fits it to the bowstring, and draws the bow at a venture, and the Spirit directs it to the sinner's heart, and wings it with the power of God.

We propose then, brethren, to lead your meditations for awhile to one of these modes of operation, presented to us in the language of the text, which, as you will observe, brings before us *a sacred place*, and points out alike the advantages which that place bestows, and the spirit in which that place should be approached; and may each one of us be enabled right gratefully to sing, "I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."

I. The literal reference you will understand to be to the place, at which the Jews were accustomed statedly to worship God, which had been selected by Divine appointment, and by whose institutions were mainly preserved the objects of the Jewish economy. If the psalm in question were composed by the royal prophet, the reference would be to the tabernacle which was fashioned in the wilderness, which moved with the people in their successive journeyings, and

which was finally established by David upon Mount Zion, whereon was afterwards erected the more splendid temple of his son.

In this place were preserved the most precious and hallowed memorials of their religion—the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; and in the inner apartment, the golden censer, and "the ark, upon which were the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant," and over which were the overshadowing cherubims, the cloud of glory being the symbol of the immediate presence of God. Before these was the altar upon which the atoning sacrifices were offered; and constantly in attendance were the various orders of the priesthood, whose was the duty to attend to all the ceremonials of religion; and whose chief, from time to time, entered into the holy place with the blood, which he sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and there supplicated for the bestowment of the Divine favour, and received the communications of the Divine will. Such, my brethren, was the sacred scene to which literal reference was made in the text—and well might it be designated the "house of God."

When, in "the fulness of time," the Eternal Son came forth from the bosom of the Father, it was like a regeneration of ecclesiastical codes. The types shrunk in the presence of their embodiment and antitype; the ceremonies vanished before him to whom they all had reference; the viceregal priests were superseded by a "royal and unchangeable priesthood;" and the Jewish dispensation, so long the wonder and amazement of surrounding nations, became fulfilled.

By the destruction of the ceremonials of this celebrated economy, a more enlarged and comprehensive ritual was given to the world; shadows and allegories gave way before substantial and promising realities of the Gospel; the universal God was no longer to confine his blessings within a narrowed and ecclesiastical framework, but each country was to be his temple, and each heart his home.

Our Saviour, who was the great instrument of this mighty change, beautifully announced the fact of alteration in that memorable conversation which he had with the woman of Samaria. She brought before his notice an ancient feud which had existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, as to what was the appointed place of exclusive worship. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." And in the fulness of the gospel provisions, of which he was the incarnation and the presiding spirit, he replies, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Neither here nor there, by way of confinement—the genius of the Gospel is too expansive to choose a solitary shrine—there is to be no tabernacle of exclusive worship, but anywhere men may build a temple, and the Lord God will dwell in it.

Brethren, we have heard of such a contest in our own times, carried on with scarcely less bitterness than in days of old. It has been authoritatively pronounced, that there is yet a place where God must alone be worshipped; and the strife of tongues has waxed long and loud as to whether it is the lofty

"Jerusalem" that has been episcopally consecrated, or the haughty "Mount Gerizim" of the papal church.

Be it enough for us, brethren, to answer these arrogant pretensions in the words of our Lord: "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father," but "when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

It stands alike a consoling promise and a blessed fact, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The place in which they statedly assemble for worship is his tabernacle, his temple, his house. He visits it with his influence, he imparts to it his favour, and nothing else is requisite to consecrate it or to render it holy. Art may have expended upon it no architectural beauty—wealth may not have ransacked her coffers to adorn it—nobility may not have condescended to sanction it with patronage—royalty may have decreed no legislation in its favour—its ceremonial may not be gorgeous—its service may not be imposing—its harmony may not thrill through the hearts of the listeners—but oh! these are not the things which God delights to honour. His all-searching eye—bright, and piercing, and quick—darts through the painted windows and the frescoed roof, and all the chiselled adornments of external decoration, straight to the hearts of the worshippers, and there, alas! how often has he beheld one at his farm, another at his merchandise—the traffic of business even in the house of prayer—the worship of Mammon and Baal even in the Temple of God.

It matters not where the true worshippers may meet, their presence is consecration — the name in which they are met is sufficient to hallow. It may be in the pillared halls of the lofty cathedral, with its gathered throng of rich-robed worshippers—or it may be in the spacious sanctuary, where congregated thousands assemble—or it may be in the thatched cottage, where the few neighbours have drawn up around the farmer's fire—or in the barn with its rudely-shaped pulpit and primitive furniture—or on the hillside, with the turf their altar, and the heavens their canopy, and the song of the forest bird the sweet accompaniment of their devotional music—or it may be, perchance, amid the swamps and jungles of India, whose inmost recesses echo to the black man's homage—yet let there but be the prayer of the penitent and the hymn of the grateful—let there but be the open voice of inspiration, declaring the purpose of God and expounding the Gospel of his Son, and there Heaven's softest sympathies will be enlisted, angels will kindly hover as the ministering spirits of the place, and a voice, as from the heavenly Jerusalem, will pronounce the solemn approval, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

Be it our object, my brethren, to seek for this constant consecration, and let us pray that the Lord may be manifested here in perpetual sacredness, that his saints may shout aloud for joy.

II. *The advantages which that place bestows*—"with the voice of joy."

This fact appears to be stated by the Psalmist as

his past experience — an experience of which his calamities had deprived him, and whose return he most ardently desired. In the eighty-fourth Psalm he expresses his lamentations in yet more touching and plaintive strains: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." There is something peculiarly interesting in the circumstances under which this complaint was uttered. The Psalmist was at this time prevented from uniting in the engagements that he loved; he had felt the cankerworm of filial ingratitude; his crown was coveted by his eldest son; that son had taken arms against him; he was hunted like a hart upon his own mountains, and excluded at once from the tabernacle and from the throne.

One would have thought the loss of dominion would have pressed heavily upon him—that he would have felt bitterly the want of the cares of government, and the right of dispensing authority. But no! the jewelled diadem presses lightly upon his head; he sets aside the pomp and pageantry of his imperial state, as mere subordinate matters; and when he recalls his former days, his long and anxious yearnings are to the tabernacle of his God.

He tells us how he envies even the birds which had nestled in the roof-tree of the sanctuary: "The sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God." And with what intensity of feeling does he proceed in the tenth verse: "I had rather be a doorkeeper"—a sitter

at the threshold—"in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Brethren, in accommodating these sentiments to our own time and case, we mean to allege, that those who are accustomed to frequent the services of the house of God, who diligently attend to them, and estimate them as they deserve and require, are made the partakers of invaluable benefits, and enjoy a happiness the purest and most exalted that can be enjoyed by man.

This allegation will be justified, when we consider that the house of God is the scene of *instruction*, of *consolation*, of *fellowship with God*, and *preparation for heaven*.

It is the scene of instruction.—The institutions and means of grace, which are established in connection with it, are all designed for spiritual illumination, and the ministry of the Gospel is especially an office of teaching, intended for the impartation of spiritual knowledge. It is a characteristic of those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, that they are "enlightened," and they are exhorted to "add to their faith knowledge." One of the purposes of the Psalmist's affection for the tabernacle was that he might "*inquire* in the temple;" and the temple is surely as an oracle, from which those lessons are spoken "which are able to make men wise unto salvation."

That you, brethren, have received in the sanctuary the impartation of spiritual knowledge, many of you are cheerfully disposed to admit; and that knowledge has not been upon inferior or subordinate matters, but upon the most momentous and important. When you

have entered the hallowed walls, you have left the world and its concerns behind you. The din of its striving and tumultuous voices has ceased for awhile. Your eye has repose from its flauntings, your ear has been relieved from its babblings, and in their stead has come the Holy Spirit, who has spoken to you in solemn friendliness, and has taught you of the past and of the future. The character of God in its matchless and immutable perfections — the state, history, and purposes of man—the exposition of the enigma of life by the development of the duties of the Gospel—the love of Christ in its multiplied modes of manifestation —these are the subjects which crowd the pages of the past and of the present; and as we have sat in the temple as listeners and pupils at the feet of the Great Teacher, he has brought them, one by one, before our minds, and enabled us to see light in his light; and then we have looked into the vale of the future, upon which there has fallen the broad and shadowless light of eternity, and the allotted recompenses have risen up before us, and we have seen the habitations of the righteous and the abodes of the wicked, alternately smiling and frowning, and shining and glooming, until we have almost heard the melody of the one, and shuddered at the wailings of the other.

And inasmuch as it "is not good" that the soul should be without this highest knowledge, inasmuch as enlarged acquaintance with spiritual truth is associated with invaluable benefit, when you consider the temple as the scene of instruction, you will not refuse to join in the language of the text: "I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."

It is the scene of consolation.—We have continually to mourn over the afflictive occurrences that are happening around us. Affliction and disappointment and bereavement and trial come like grim spectres, haunting every avenue, and constantly flitting across the path of life. The universe is charged with weeping. "Man is born to trouble." "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The religion of the Gospel is designed to impart comfort to those who are in sorrows. He, by whom it was revealed, is the God of all consolation; and he has embodied the message which his ministers are authorized to deliver: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." These consolations are sought for and applied in private life, but it is in the house of God that they are brought out in their brightest effulgence, and with their clearest lustre. There are, perhaps, no cases in the vast varieties of human grief which have not been alleviated here. *Here* the contrite one has been led to dry his tears and hush his throbbings at the sight and at the foot of the cross. *Here* the poor beggar of this world's riches has been put into possession of the "pearl of great price" and the "unsearchable riches of Christ." *Here* the oppressed and anxious have cast their burden on the Lord, and found that he could sustain them. *Here* the father, bereaved and childless—of whose offspring death has deprived him, written in the very heart of his existence a sudden and strange erasure, and smitten to the dust the hope and summit of his pride—has been led to look upward and to quiet his convulsive agitations, and bless and worship the Redeemer, who has gathered the

lambs in his arms and folded them to his bosom. *Here* the widow has been led to trust in the widow's Helper, and has felt her desolate heart overflow with more than a husband's love. *Here* the orphan, awaking from the trance of grief which had oppressed him with a mute insanity, has felt himself comforted, and with tears in his eyes has remembered his "Father, who is in heaven." *Here* the poor frightened one, in the prospect of encountering the last enemy, has felt himself nerved with the strength of the Lord, and impatient for the final struggle. But we need not proceed. Are you not responding, "That case is mine, and the house of God has been the scene of consolation to me"? Then, brethren, we call upon you to adopt the language of the Psalmist when he says, "I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."

It is the scene of fellowship with God.—In the ancient tabernacle this was a high and peculiar blessing. When the high priest entered within the veil with the blood of the sacrifice, he realized the fulfilment of the promise, "I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the cherubim;" and the congregation through his medium enjoyed communion with God. At the abrogation of the Jewish economy, the veil of the temple, which had effectually excluded the people from the directer glory, was rent in twain; the privileged and exclusive priesthood was abolished, and we can now, all of us, enter into the innermost sanctuary, and see the flashings of the light upon the innermost shrine.

The house of God is the place where this blessing

is permanently and delightfully enjoyed; and there is not one of its services which has not a tendency to bring us nearer to the God we serve.

Is it praise? As the voice of our thankful melody has arisen, have we not often been wrapt in a kind of apocalyptic vision, and, piercing the narrow confines of time, have we not beheld the heaven of our hope and prospect, with its venerable elders and its seraph bands of worshippers, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne? and as we have gazed enraptured on the sight, have we not been constrained to acknowledge,

> "That palace of our glorious King,
> We find it nearer while we sing."

Is it prayer? Have we not gone into the very presence-room of God and conversed with him there, as a man converseth with his friend? Have we not felt the warmth of the Spirit we asked for descending upon us, nerving us with a strange, because a heavenly, courage, and girding us for the battles of this stormy and uncertain life?

Is it the reading of the Scriptures? Has not the sight of the Lord, a beam from his glory, a glance from his eye, flashed upon the sacred page, and discovered to us varied beauties that were unknown before?

Is it the administration of the Holy Communion? As we have bowed around the sacred table, have we not felt our hearts charged with the love of him who died for us? And with no distempered vision, but in the calm prospect of faith, have we not seen him on the cross bleeding for our redemption, and on the throne pleading for our safety?

Times there have been, brethren, when this rapturous communion has been ours. Do ye not remember them? Are they not the eras of your existence—your festival days—the bright and sunny hours in your retrospect of life? Are they not the times whose memory you fondly cherish, and after whose returns you most ardently strive? Then we call on you by that remembrance to adopt the language of the Psalmist: "I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."

It is the scene of preparation for heaven.

All the institutions of God's appointing, however rich in blessing or fragrant with promise, are designed to subserve the purification of believers, and to clothe them with a meetness for heaven. That this is especially true with regard to the ordinances of the sanctuary, many who are now present will be prepared very cheerfully to acknowledge. Often, when the tired spirit, sated of the world's pleasures, and perplexed with its concerns, passes through the dry valley of Baca, the sanctuary "makes it a well," and it can "drink of the brook in the way," and refreshed again "lift up its head." Often, amid the dejection of manifold temptations, you have come to the house of prayer, and under the reviving influences of heavenly grace, "your soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler," and walking in the calm and deep serene, you have wondered that you ever doubted at all.

Again, you can recall the time when you were battling strongly with that powerful allurement to sin—almost irresistible in the appeals it made to your weaker nature—and in the moment of your extremity

you fled to the sanctuary as to a city of refuge; and Jesus was present there, and a glance of his pure countenance, and a touch of his invigorating hand, and you were strong to battle and to triumph.

There was a moral torpor seized you in your Christian course, a spiritual paralysis chained you in bondage, your very soul seemed dead within you, and the time when you loved God and the candle of the Lord shone brightly in your tabernacle had scarcely an existence, save in faint and lingering memory; and one memorable morning in the house of God, the glorious presence of the Saviour burst upon the chained one, you were galvanized by the cross, you stretched forth your withered hand to lift it up in prayer, and from that moment, in the strength and nobility of spiritual life, you have gone on your way rejoicing. Nay, haply a cold estrangement had come upon you, you had forsaken the association of Christian brotherhood, you were about to depart even from the outer-court worshippers, and to link yourself with the scoffer and with the ungodly, and you cast a cold glance of alienation behind you, as the expression of your unkind farewell — and there, on that last morning, your glance was met by another, even that kind upbraiding glance which broke Peter's heart, and it broke yours; and thus the Temple was your birthplace, and the song at the close of that service was your nativity hymn, and at that moment you were born of God. Have you these reminiscences? Then by their very sacredness, never to be forgotten, I call on you to join with the Psalmist: "I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise."

VIII.

THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL.

"Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."—Ps. liii. 6.

THIS is one of those psalms which were wailed out at intervals during the time of captivity, when, though the hope of deliverance was still innerly cherished, the day which was to realize it had not dawned even on the clearest vision. All these psalms have a plaintive character of their own, such as might have been expected when all the outward circumstances were untoward, and no joy of home or freedom quivered in the heart whose fingers swept the strings. And yet the prisoners were prisoners of hope; and throughout all disastrous changes, confidence in the brighter future existed and reigned within them, as a principle too finely established to be shaken, either by tyrannous exactions or by fleeting years.

Brethren, the centuries have rolled away, each with its own burden of vicissitude, and with its own record of progress; but there is a long captivity which has never once been lifted from one fated nation, and beneath which they are languishing to-day. The mournful story which Vespasian's medal tells is the story of

the Jewish nation now. The weeper still sits beneath the palm tree, the one hand listless alike from music and labour, the other covering the eyes whose lids droop heavily; and she makes her sad plaint to a world which has too often scorned her, and to a church which has too often been indifferent to her claims, in the very language of ancient prophecy: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

It is my purpose—a purpose which, I fear, with every endeavour to be helpful to the cause I advocate, I shall very imperfectly fulfil—to present before you, in condensed fulness, the condition and the destiny of the once favoured race of Israel, reminding you—

I. *That their salvation is needed.*
II. *That their salvation is promised.*
III. *That Christians are bound to seek it by personal effort and prayer.*

I. There is nothing which more strongly moves the sympathies of the thoughtful, than to behold some impoverished descendant of an ancient house gazing mournfully upon the demesne which he once called his own, but which has passed into the hands of the stranger; or some scion of the De Courcys and Plantagenets starving, in the squalid destitution to which his spendthrift habits have reduced him. The inspiring associations of the past do but deepen the present desolation, and our pity for his fall is the deeper because of the contrast from his former heritage of

rank and fortune. Here is not an individual, but a nation thus homeless and ruined—a nation that could once outrival the proudest and most highly privileged. If it be considered that the antiquity of a family, and the great names won by those who have belonged to it, aggravate the calamity of its fall, then your pity for this prostrate people may be intense, because in their case both these conditions exist. The haughtiest noble who boasts of Norman blood has not an ancestry half so renowned, nor a lineage half so pure, as the poor Jew pedlar, on whose vagrancy he thinks with pity, or whose sordidness he rebukes with scorn.

The Jew had had a history for long years before the Babylonian empire laid the foundations of its power, before a dwelling rose upon the Capitoline Hills, before the Confederate Greeks assembled beneath the walls of Troy. Where the records of other empires are lost, or have drivelled into the veriest fable, you have accurate records, drawn under divine guidance, of patriarchal customs and times, when this wondrous people were chosen to be witnesses for God. When the antiquarian eye glistens before some fragment of the ancient Babylon, it may be that he gazes on the disinterred handiwork of some Jewish builder. When the traveller is wearied with the climbing of the Pyramids, it is not improbable that the Jew piled up their steep stairs of stone. When the explorer penetrates into the royal tombs at Thebes, there stares out at him from the walls the very Hebrew physiognomy, which is so familiar in the midst of us to-day.

Hebrew chieftains were brave, and Hebrew shepherds wealthy, when time itself was young. It will be

remembered also, that theirs are some of the most illustrious names which the annals of the world record. Why should they despair of statesmanship, for whom Moses enacted his wise and patient lawgiving, and in whose veins the blood of Daniel flows? Why should not they be brave, who are the descendants of Joshua and of the valiant Maccabees? Why scorn them as if they were incapable of genius, when they are of the kindred of Ezekiel the fiery-eyed, or Isaiah the glorious, or the minstrel monarch of Israel? Who shall say that all their wealth of wisdom was monopolized by Solomon, or that all their power of command was translated with Elijah, or that all their marvels of eloquence ceased with the last words of Paul? Who will not weep that *they* should ever be stubborn and degraded, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." But this nation, thus venerable in its history and rich in its renowned sons, has vanished. It is now "scattered and peeled," and its children inherit the displeasure which, as we believe, eighteen hundred years ago their fathers invoked upon themselves. The Prophet promised by Moses rose up in the midst of them, but they refused to hearken to his words; the Messiah "came to his own, but his own received him not." The day of visitation dawned in clearness and brilliancy, but they trifled or opposed through its noontide to its twilight, until it set before their eyes. Their own obduracy in the rejection of the Saviour issued in their own *rejection from being the privileged people, and in their exile from the land where such glorious opportunities had been given.*

Just look more largely at each of these thoughts for a moment. The whole ritual of Jewish service supposes that there be a living heart in the worshipper; otherwise there is nothing in the services to redeem them from formality, or to distinguish them from any other ceremonies of unmeaning symbolism. In Levitical times, this inspiring heart was the hope and promise of the Messiah; in the times of the Redeemer's incarnation, it was belief in the Messiah who had come, and whose coming had been approved by miracles, announced by angels, and attested by Divine sanctions of impressiveness and power. But to the mass of the Jewish people this heart, this trust, was lacking. To them first were the tidings proclaimed; their ancestral right and the boundlessness of Christ's compassion alike necessitated that. But they rejected the counsel of God against themselves; and, by consequence, the vitality languished out of their system, the symbol of God's presence abode no longer in the temple, and the temple itself was by and by razed to its foundations, so that not one stone was left upon another. How remarkable a fulfilment has there been of the woes of Hosea's prophecy: "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim" (Hos. iii. 4). From that time there has been no king of the Jews, nor even the remnant of a nation over which he could reign; they have now no high priest, for their genealogies are lost, and they know not, it is said, who are of the tribe of Levi and who of the family of Aaron. Their sacrifice is no

longer presented, for the chief Rabbi is an officer unknown to their law, and invested with no mediatorial authority, and in burdensome ceremonies they spend the annual day of expiation—ceremonies which cannot possibly profit them. The Mishna and Gemara of their Talmuds have so encumbered the law, that they no longer study it with reverence as their fathers did; and though there are reactionary symptoms here and there, and some are evidently panting after the true light of the Word, of the mass it may be said with truth now as in the days when Paul wrote to Corinth, "When Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart."

Not a few of them, from this fatal neglect of God's Word, have relapsed into a species of Deism, and multitudes into a total and eclipsing worldliness, which renders them practically atheists in the world. Their worship is more a bodily than a spiritual service; and there is mournfully little, either of instruction for the mind, or of the cultivation of purity for the heart. They cling yet vainly to the dream of the coming Messiah; but are readier to anticipate their uplifting from their manifold afflictions and their restoration to their patrimonial home, than the circumcision of the heart and the mastery over human passion, which we have learnt to be the highest glories of his kingdom. Alas for them! they have been so often mocked with shadows, that it is said they have a curse for him who shall calculate the time of the Redeemer's advent. Alas for them! if they are sincere and earnest, their consciences are but lashed into accusing activity to be lulled into a delusive repose. Alas for them! to a crouching fear of death they are all their lifetime

subject to bondage, and at the best have but a glimmering ray, with which to light their pilgrim footsteps in their last travel to the dark unknown. Surely they need the kind offices of Christian compassion, and the prayer unceasingly offered that their eyes may be delivered from their films of blindness, and the hearts of the disobedient turned about to the wisdom of the

If you take the other thought—their dispersion into all lands—their condition will be still more appreciated in its painfulness and ruin. It is not idly that Jeremiah says, "God hath delivered them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither he shall drive them." How marvellous their history has been, and continues to be in this matter—scattered, to denationalize them—but one in the mighty sympathies which have defied all the disasters of the years! You see them present everywhere—but having nowhere their belongings—rising up in the midst of national combinations, like a strange chemical element, which refuses affinity with everything with which men try to mingle it—always identical, but always homeless. There never was possibly a more terrible siege, either in ancient or in modern warfare, than the siege of Jerusalem. The mind sickens over the recital of the combined horrors of the slaughter and the famine, as they are recorded in the annalist's page; but there were darker woes and fiercer cruelties behind. Decrees of banishment succeeded the downfall of the city; the first wild attempt at insurrection was expiated by

the destruction of half a million of the remnant that was left; and, in the time of Hadrian, the heaviest penalties were threatened upon any Hebrew who remained in Jewry. He might not oar the blue waters of Tiberias, nor own a rood in the fertile Sharon, nor, save by stealth or by bribe, steal a glance upon the hill of Zion; and, cruellest of all, he could not even have in Hebron the poor comfort of a grave, for he must wander witheringly throughout succeeding ages. Though surrounding governments ran through all grooves of change, no reversal of the attainder came upon the disinherited Jew. Jerusalem had been overrun by successive hordes of strangers—all religions but the purest had been professed within its walls—all alien tribes could find shelter and traffic—but it was inexorably barred against the entrance of its own children. From the minaret there might gleam the crucifix of the Papist, or wave the crescent of the Ottoman, or shine the bright lances of the tameless Arab—the Jew was still proscribed; or if, now and then, there dawned a milder policy or more merciful times, he lived in his own home by sufferance, and, in literal fulfilment of the prophecy, he had "a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind, and feared day and night, and had none assurance of his life."

And *now*, though they have larger immunity than before, they are practically in banishment still. They have no portion in Jerusalem, and scarcely a memorial; they owe their tolerated presence in the Holy City to the protection which the British flag gives to its own subjects everywhere, or they have bargained for a foot-

hold; and, to regain this inalienable birthright, have purchased this gift of God with money. Not only are they exiled still from Jerusalem—exiled so thoroughly that it is computed that at this day there are fewer Jews in Palestine than in London—but there has been no colonization among them, by which they have become politically considerable in any other country, and have gathered to a head of power. The scattering has been complete and perpetual. This marvellous people have a sort of ubiquity. They live in every nation of Europe, they swell the tide of emigration, and turn up, mysterious and shrewd, at the antipodes; they shiver in Siberia and Greenland, and scorch in Afric's heat, and bow before the simoom of the desert, and lave their wearied limbs in Gunga's sacred stream. In all countries where they have wandered, persecution and contempt have awaited them. In the East their sufferings have been multiplied; the lazy Turk rouses himself to express his momentary anger against the Hebrew. Chivalrous France, classic Italy, romantic Spain, tolerant and thoughtful Germany, all in former days have treated the Jew with cruelty, and in later times with slander and with scorn; and in England, free, enlightened, happy, there are dark historic pages which record the calamities of the Israelite—how avarice was rapacious, and chivalry unknightly, and honour, even royal honour, belied, and the common laws of right and honesty forgotten when their interests were concerned—how Saxon, Thane, and Norman noble alike thrust them from the courtesies of life—and how even the swineherd and the jester dared insult the velvet gaberdine with ribald oaths and with unseemly scorn.

It is but lately that all the reproach of persecution has been wiped away, and even now there are but few of us that have felt as we ought for this people—still, after so many ages, branded with their original curse, and without a prince and without a sacrifice. Think with Christian sympathy of their political dispersion, and of their religious danger, and I am sure that there will be struck upon your hearts such a consciousness of needed salvation, that you will cry out in the entreaties of the text, "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

II. We come to notice that their salvation is attainable. The harp is not always to hang idly upon the willows, nor to be swept by troubled fingers to wild and plaintive music. The penal curse is to be reversed; the malediction, though it has hung over the unhappy race for ages, is not eternal. The existence and operation of the society whose claims we advocate to-day, are the proofs that a widespread belief of this has obtained in the Christian church.

You feel, all of you, that when you feel tenderly towards this disinherited elder brother of the family, and long for his reinstatement in the inheritance which he has sold for nought, you have both warrant for your tender wishes, and hope that they will be realized in the love and words of the Father.

But what do we mean when we speak of the salvation of Israel? It is, perhaps, necessary to explain our terms, as the word may be variously understood.

We at once affirm our meaning to be, the conversion of the Jewish nation unto Christ — their looking upon him whom they have pierced, not in rage, as many of them do now, not in remorse and hopelessness, as in the quick recoil of conviction they might be tempted to do, but in contrite and godly sorrow. All other meanings which may be put upon the word, are lacking if they include not this first and highest.

Some look for political deliverance—a social salvation, beneath whose amenities they shall be refined into that higher character, from which their long persecutions have debased them. But if you invest them with all rights of citizenship here, or bring them to their own land with all the spontaneous gladness of a jubilee, but do not change their hearts, the curse, which has cleaved to them in their wanderings, would cleave to them equally in the city of their solemnities—an abomination of desolation more hateful than the Roman eagle flaunting in the holy place.

Some look for mental emancipation—an emergence from the bondage of the Rabbinical law into a sort of free-thinking liberalism, which is cousin-german to absolute infidelity.

Some expect only to see the Hebrews come over to a speculative adhesion to the Messiahship of Christ, or to a mere nominal adoption of the Christian name.

Brethren, if all we do by our efforts be but to dislodge the Jew from his ancestral faith, to unsettle his cherished ideas, and to supply him with nothing better, we incur a very alarming responsibility, and accomplish a very doubtful good. If we persuade to an intellectual

assent only, though we secure silence from the blasphemies and removal of the prejudice, we are just hiding light in darkness, and making darkness denser by the sad eclipse. If we are content with a nominal profession of Christianity, we give premiums to the crafty and the sordid, and lay ourselves open to the perpetration of those discreditable frauds upon us, which have already created a *primâ facie* impression of distrust against a converted Jew.

Nothing will at once fulfil the mission of the Christian church and satisfy her pants of roused desire, but the real renovation of the Jewish race, that they may individually become heirs of the grace of pardon, reconciled to God through Christ, "having their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." That this result will be accomplished we do verily and in truth believe; and that not by special miracle, not by any process other than that which makes every conversion miraculous, but by the power of the Holy Ghost, acting in persuasive might upon their own free power of choice, and making effectual the appeal of the ministry or the utterance of the Word.

Surely there is no irreversible hindrance in God, nor invincible stubbornness in Hebrew hearts against the truth. It is true that the curse has been pleaded in bar of Christian endeavour to reclaim them—just as it was pleaded in justification of the accursed system of slavery—but "God hath not cast off his people whom he foreknew." It is true that the Jews themselves acknowledge a peculiar hardness about Jewish natures, and that many others would be inclined to the opinion which Luther somewhat roughly affirms: "Ein Juden-

Herz ist stock-, stein-, eisen-, teufelhart;"[1] but it is the stony out of the flesh which God has specially promised to remove.

Rooted as are their prejudices, they can be rooted out by Gospel husbandry. It was not only for a witness that Christ's pitying tenderness enjoined the "beginning at Jerusalem" of the tidings of great joy; and, as if to shame and silence for ever Gentile indolence and unbelief, God gave, in the initial campaign of the apostles, a glorious Pentecostal type of the conversion of Israel, in the three thousand Jews who were smitten and saved under Peter's rousing words.

There are many circumstances, moreover, which exalt our hopes for the conversion of the Jewish people. It is not for nothing, surely, but in fulfilment of some divine purpose, that they have preserved their individuality through so many centuries of years, and that the land of their fathers has been held in such marvellous abeyance of possession. Interpreting the future by the past, we may well conclude that his mercy yearns over them, "though his hand is stretched out still." Mercy hid herself behind all their sufferings in the former time. Behind the bondage of Egypt was the education for a magnificent nationality, and the *prestige* which came upon them by the manner of their deliverance, and the destruction of their enemies. Behind the wandering in the wilderness was the training—never interrupted during the forty years—for the Canaan of inheritance and rest. Behind the Assyrian and the Babylonish captivities, there was the purpose to disgust them with idolatry, and to make

[1] A Jew heart is stick-stone-iron-devil-hard.

their witness to the Divine Unity more distinct and impressive. Some gracious design is manifest in each painful infliction or seeming abandonment, and why should it not be so now? Is it not astounding that they should continue to exist?

Aboriginal tribes of the forest have died out before advancing civilisation. The Jew has had more persecution than any of them, but he lives still. Violence and strife have pursued him unrelentingly; he has been driven before Pagan lances, and scorched by Romish faggots, and gashed by Turkish scimitars with cruel wounds; all the enginery of torture, and all the exactions of tyranny, have been employed to exterminate him—and yet he lives. Empires have decayed—and he seems to have risen from their ruins. Kingdoms have been born—and he has assisted at the birth. Everywhere he wanders on his separate way, amid the Bourses of Europe, beneath the glare of tropic suns, amid costly archipelagoes of ocean. His distinction even of suffering is as glorious to him, as were the displayed phylacteries to the Pharisees of old. Amid many temptations to coalesce, though not the balance only, but the entirety of temporal motive inclined to persuade him to amalgamate—though with but little difficulty he might at one time have united with the Mohammedan power, and so have secured impunity and the chances of revenge—yet through all hazards he has maintained his separation, exclaiming with all the fervour with which men express a passion of their souls, "I am a Jew, I can never be anything else but a Jew. I may become a Christian, I can never become a Gentile"—wearing his national reproach,

as a fallen king his diadem; faithful to the traditions of his ancestors, even in his altered fortunes, "as the sunflower turns to the sun when he sets the same look which she turned when he rose."

If you add to this consideration that which invests it with a still greater marvel—namely, that it is computed that there has not only been preservation of race, but an approximate equality in number, and that there are three millions and a half of Jews in the world to-day, just as there were when the chariots drave heavily after them, and the Red Sea rolled back at their glorious leader's signal—you cannot refuse the conviction that all this has not been an arbitrary impulse, but a Divine arrangement; that the Fath has tracked the prodigal in all his wanderings, and that by and by there shall be the best robe, and the music, and the festival, because of the dead that is alive again, and of the lost that is found.

There are not wanting indications, moreover, in the feeling of all thoughtful men, of an awakened interest in this great matter of Israel's salvation. The mind of Christendom is no longer indifferent. Christians of every name have interred their ancient prejudices against the Hebrew, and vie with each other to atone for the criminal apathy of the past by being no longer laggards nor idlers, but by compassing this cause with the tenderness of sympathy, with the diligence of faithful labour, and with the importunity of prayer.

Among the Jews themselves there are stirrings and quickenings, as of a nascent birth. Many questions and customs, which the Rabbinism of the ages has enjoined, have been discarded by their modern in-

telligence; and there has been struck in many hearts a chord of earnest feeling which has led them to the study of the prophecies, only to be dismayed by the conclusion that the Messiah has already come. Their prejudices against Jesus have in many instances been diminished; there is an eagerness to receive, and an insatiableness to devour, the New Testament Scriptures among many, who a few years ago would have scorned to touch them as unclean. And last, not least, many among them have been actually converted, and evidence, in consistent living and earnest missionary toil, that they have passed from death unto life.

In this review of probabilities, I have abstained from the mention of that which forecloses the entire argument—while yet it is a sure resting-place for faith,—the absolute promise of God. It is, however, impossible to read many parts of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea's prophecies, or to follow the apostle's argument in the 11th of Romans, without resting upon the assurance, as clearly revealed as any part of the Divine will, that "if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

Yes, Israel shall be saved! God hath promised it, and it shall be so. Vain shall be all the efforts of the world and the devil to hinder it. Through the degeneracy of character, and through the incrustation of prejudice, and through the inveteracy of habit, and through the teeming slaveries of years, the conquering word of Jesus shall make its resistless way. In deepest sorrow for the great wrong they did to the Crucified, "the land shall mourn, every family apart;"

until, sprinkled with the blood they shed, they shall rejoice in his purity and healing, and in the great day when the multitudes shall gather for the coronation of the Son of man, there shall be the Jew—eldest born among the aristocracies—with an ancestry that dates before parchments, "concerning the flesh" of the kindred of the King, bending the knee, foremost in the homage, lifting the voice most tuneful in the praise, and, with an eagerness that no other can outrival, "bringing forth the royal diadem, to crown him Lord of all."

Brethren, to hasten this consummation all of you may contribute. The Hebrew people have many claims upon you. They are men, and they appeal to you for the common pitifulness of manhood. They are men in need and in peril; and their sorrows, like the wounds of the ancient Greek, are their advocates before you.

Much of our present privilege came to us by their means. Their bards sang for us. Their prophets thrill us yet. The grand fishermen and tent-makers whom they sent forth are inspirations to us at this hour. They kept through a long dark night, and amid a horde of prowling enemies, the lively oracles of God. We have to atone to them for the wrongs of ages. Children of those who oppressed them, and who killed their prophets, we should do better than build their sepulchres—we should teach them how, holily, to live, and how, hopefully and triumphantly, to die.

God has not finally cast them away. Christ died for them, and intercedes in his royalty for their

recovery. The Spirit strives with them with a power which many of them are unwilling to acknowledge. Now your duty is before you—to work and pray for their salvation, and to let the active benevolence testify to the sincerity with which the lips have breathed the prayer: "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

IX.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—I.

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."—LUKE xv. 11-16.

THERE is something in this inimitable parable which goes straight to every human heart. It is almost impossible to refuse an entrance to it; it storms the strongest fortress of the soul. By its appeal to that latent sensibility to impression—that dormant or sepulchred humanness which underlies, in every man, his surface of passion or pride—it makes its way to the sympathy of the rudest, and surprises the most callous into the emotion which finds its best relief in tears. The child loves to hear its simple and affecting story; and many a criminal, whom crime has done its worst to harden, has been sub-

dued by some stray hearing of its experience—it seemed so like his own. The occasion of its utterance was partly in vindication of a character, and partly in enforcement of a principle. When the Saviour entered upon his public ministry, "the common people heard him gladly," and his tones of tenderness had a charm for the most detested and depraved. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." But this fact, which one would have thought would at once have commended his teaching, was tortured into an accusation against him by the malignity of the Pharisee-mind. From the beginning the scribes and Pharisees had honoured him with their hatred, had plotted to ensnare him into the utterance of sedition or of blasphemy, and had watched eagerly for his fall. All their prejudices were shocked beyond forgiveness, both by the circumstances of his advent, and by the whole tenor of his life. They looked for a King who should sway a visible sceptre, and dwell in a royal palace, or for a Teacher who should pay his court to the doctors of the law, and, having won over the highest minds, should select from among them those who should be authorized to dispense his truth; or, if not these, for a Prophet who should be recluse and uncourtly, and who, awful in sanctities which the city would pollute, could therefore abide only in the wilderness. This was their ideal of the long-promised Messiah; and when Jesus came—not a monarch, but a Nazarene—not a recluse, but a "friend of publicans and sinners"—not the retailer of esoteric doctrine to the privileged few, but the great preacher upon whose

lips hung the multitude with amazement and delight —their prejudice deepened into an implacable hostility, which pursued its victim to the death. It is difficult to conceive of a course more calculated to provoke them than that which the Saviour consistently pursued. They looked down upon the masses of the people with a contempt which they cared not to conceal. "This people which knoweth not the law are cursed;" and if there was one class which was held in greater abhorrence than another, it was the class which gathered the taxes of a hated foreign power, and, dressed in a little brief authority, made their office doubly odious by rapacity and extortion. And yet, passing by the anointed priest, the venerable elder, the astute scribe—not to mention themselves, the reputable and ascetic Pharisees—these were the very classes to whom the new Teacher addressed himself, and in whose companionship he was wont to mingle. Enmity could hardly fail to seize upon so fair an occasion, and she improved it to the uttermost. "Surely," she would say, in her envenomed addresses and conversations—"surely you will no more listen to ravings like these! The man has no character; he speaks blasphemy—does his works of healing on the Sabbath—does not fast—drags out a mendicant existence—eats with unwashen hands—consorts with the vilest, doubtless from congeniality of feeling—'receives sinners and eats with them.'" Now it is partly to vindicate himself against this accusation that the Saviour unfolds to them his principle of action, and appeals to the home-experience of them all whether that principle was not one of the commonest of life.

The principle is this, that the mind uniformly goes out in deepest interest, among all the objects of attachment, after that one which is in peril. The three parables illustrate it well. You do not wonder that the woman should be listless about the nine pieces of silver, safe in the desk or in the drawer, but that she should be active and interested about the one piece which she had lost. You feel at once that it is nature for the shepherd to leave the ninety and nine folded, though it were in the wilderness, and seek in pit and glen for the one hapless which had wandered astray. And when the illustration is carried higher, and the thing in peril is not a coin, nor a sheep, but a child, you feel, in your heart of hearts—and it is commended to you by your own experience—by the clinging tenderness with which you yearned over the dying babe, by the wakeful anxiety with which you tremble for the absent son—that the child that had been alienated, and around whose history had darkened clouds of shame and sin, would on his return wake the highest raptures of deliverance, and be greeted with the heartiest welcome of the father's soul. It is impossible to compress all the lessons of this interesting parable into one discourse. The very riches of the subject have indeed hitherto deterred our approach to it; but now that, in Divine help, we are venturing among its hidden treasures, we will confine ourselves at first to a brief meditation upon

I. *The prodigal's sin*, and

II. *Its consequences;*

Leaving his change of mind, the bliss of his recovery, and the rather interesting problem of the conduct of

the elder son, to furnish us with profit on some future occasion.

And first, as to the prodigal's sin. It has struck me that some amongst you may be congratulating yourselves in secret that here at least you are safe from denunciation and alarm, because the delineation must be of uncommon sin, and of a broad and strongly-marked type of depravity, from whose brand you feel yourselves free. Nay, it is rather one of the most ordinary phases of impiety. I could select thousands upon thousands in this great city who answer in every particular to the graphic description of the text. Do you see that young man, of high spirits and assured mien—full of generous impulses, carried away by a thoughtless enthusiasm—for whom almost everybody has a good word, about whom there can be many tales told of his quick and graceful courtesy, and of the money that he has squandered in gifts of romantic generosity—a little gay, to be sure, men say, but he's so good-hearted: he is no man's enemy but his own. He would not hurt a worm. He will be sure to see his folly, and it will be all right with him by and by. Ah! THAT is he—the very embodiment of the younger son before us. There is nothing in the narrative which would lead us to suppose that he was disfigured by malevolence or by cruelty. He is not accused of betrayal of human trust, nor of outrage upon human charities. He is very far removed from the sordid and the dastardly. He is simply, like thousands now, a careless, light-hearted child of the world, eager for present enjoyment, and, in the twining of his affections round some realized good, forgetful of the great

future for which he ought to live. There is nothing, therefore, in the case before us that can justify your inattention, or that can encourage you to hope that you will escape from the pressure of the truth; and in the anatomy of the prodigal's transgression you will find the scalpel at work upon yourselves.

He sinned, 1, *Because of the alienation of his affection.* There was the root of his rebellion. He had forgotten the obligations of his position, and the kind outflowings of that generous heart which, for his indulgence, had spared neither effort nor sacrifice. His heart had wandered from its early tenderness, and had become warped, by yielding to a sinful lust of freedom, from its filial love. From this alienated heart, in natural sequence, flowed his after disobedience and sin. And it is to the heart that we must look, brethren, to discover the secret of our own rebellion. We are conscious, each one of us, if we will calmly consider the matter, that our affections are naturally estranged from God. It has been well observed, and there is in the observation both philosophic and religious truth, that there is both an attractive and a repelling principle in human nature towards God. There are instincts in the soul which rise up responsive when we are told that there is a God, and which prompt us to seek for succour or to render homage. There are times in every man's life when he is irresistibly drawn out after God in sentimental or imploring adoration. Whenever emotions are aroused, whether they be of gratitude or of terror, the mind tramples in a moment upon its loudly-vaunted atheisms. When we thrill delightedly at some inspiring tidings, or before some

superb scene of travel—when we are rescued from some terrible peril, or give the heart-grasp to some loved one just spared to us from the gates of the grave; or when, on the other hand, we are remorseful for some recent sin, in some awakening hour of conscience, beneath some great agony of spirit, when our burdened hearts can find no outlet but in prayer—when we bend over the fastly-waning life which we would give a world to reanimate, or when ourselves are racked in some struggle of mortal pain;—these are the seasons when we betake ourselves to the thought of the Divine, and call upon the God whom we have been taught to worship, to inspire our faith, or to remove our fear. But even in these moments, when we are attracted towards God, we are conscious of an influence that repels. We are drawn back, as it were, by the power of some invisible hand. In prosperity we are prone, the while we revel in the gift, to be forgetful of the Giver: our hearts become at ease in their possessions, and are inflated with pride. In adversity we either turn our own trouble inwards, and brood about it till it maddens us, or try to lose it amid the whirl of the world's excitements, or drown it in the cup of the drunkard; and some, infatuated, seek to end the sting of the sorrow by the steel of the suicide. In our consciousness of sin, we either try to banish it from our thoughts entirely, or to believe that the chances of future time will favour us, or to pacify our consciences by a round of external observances; or, in our own strength, to wrestle proudly with our corruptions, that we may overcome them. In all these conditions, "God is not in all our

thoughts," and we avail ourselves of any resource or expedient rather than seek rest and healing in him. Our hearts are alienated, there is no outgoing of affection towards the Creator within us. We coldly admit his existence, and that is all; and when we think of him, it is either with supreme indifference or with abject terror. Brethren, I do charge home upon you this rebellion of the heart to-day, as the fruitful source of your every overt act of treason. Pressing through all the developments of external character, and all the secrecies of conflicting motive, I seize hold of your innermost heart, and I say, Here is the traitor. This heart has thrown off its allegiance, and leagued itself with rebels. This *heart* "is not right in the sight of God." With the heart thus alienated, you can the more readily explain the prodigal's *impatience of restraint*, hankering after present licence of enjoyment, and departure from the house of his father. All these followed as the natural consequences of estranged affection. A yoke that is *felt* must always be galling; an enforced servitude stirs up within the man all latent feelings of rebellion. Hence, when the principle of filial love was gone, the restraint of the home became irksome, the desire for independence grew into a passion, and then followed the project of the journey into a far country, and of the uncontrolled rioting in the portion of goods. And the like sad absence of reverent love to God has produced in all sinners the like impatience of his laws, and the like wanderings of heart and life. Feelings are the germs of actions; and it is impossible for an affection to be cherished without an intensification of its energy

which will give colour and direction to every activity of the man. We cannot take fire into our bosom, and then escape the penalty of the burning. We cannot without hazard play with the fang of the asp; nor, until the millennium shall arrive, may the child put his hand upon the cockatrice's den. You cannot look into yourselves, and study carefully your own spiritual state, without confession of your own guilt in this matter. You were indifferent or hostile to God's government. The very conscience which reminded you of his claims, obscured his loving-kindness from you, and urged you to hide from his displeasure. Then you fretted against his laws, and felt them an exacting tyranny rather than an honourable service. Then you were consumed with an avarice for present enjoyment; and, with a churl's selfishness, you took the bounty from the Father at the time when you were panting to rebel against his authority, and into a far country—the farther the better for your purpose, because the more seemingly beyond control—you took your departure from the ancestral home. And with occasional variations, now of more notorious, now of more deceitful impiety, this is the biography of you all. It is no strange tale of unexampled ill. It is no foreign history of evil, so atrocious and so alien that you shudder as at the news of a distant massacre, and thank God that you are not as other men. *You* are the ingrates who have abused the Father's kindness; *you* the spendthrifts who have run to this excess of riot; *you* the prodigals who are thus exiled from the Father's heart and home. Brethren, take the humbling truth; and deem me not your enemy for

telling it. It is no joy to me thus to dwell upon the prostration of the nature which I share. There is a natural pride within me, which would make me delight to vaunt with the loudest the dignity of human nature, if I dare. But it were folly to cicatrize a wound while the mischief festers in the flesh, or to hide a peril lest a shock should be given to the nervous system of the man in danger; and I but prove the sincerity of my good wishes for your welfare, when I follow you into the land of your wandering, and warn you to repent and to return.

It is with like purpose that I now proceed to dwell upon the results or consequences of your sin. The text intimates that there was a season of revelry, during which no outward calamities overtook the prodigal; when he revelled in his delirium of pleasure, and in his dream of freedom; when passion drowned thought, and silenced conscience, and banished fear; and when, with ample means and boisterous associates, he "withheld not his heart from any joy." It were to defeat our own purpose to affirm that there are no pleasures in sin. The world would never continue in its ways if it reaped no gratification. There is doubtless something congenial to the wayward heart in the objects of its fond pursuit, and there is often thrown a blinding charm about the man, beneath whose spell unholy he fancies every Hecate a Ganymede, and dallies with deformity which he mistakes for beauty; but our point is this, that in every course of transgression, in every departure of the human spirit from God, there is debasement in the process, and there is ruin in the inevitable end. I think this statement is

borne out by the passage on whose truth we are now dilating. There are several ideas suggested by it, which present a fearful picture of the disastrous consequences of sin. There is, for example, what has been well expressed by the word *homelessness*.[1] He was in a far country: there was the absence, even in his wildest revelry, of domestic joys, and orderly comforts, and all those nameless endearments which realize to a man the feeling of home. There are nations to which this idea of homelessness brings no sense of loss. You might talk vainly about home amid the bleak, gay, outside life of Paris. They have not the word in their language—they have not the thing in their hearts; but to you who know what it is—to whom such words as hearth-stone, and roof-tree, and ingle-nook, and fireside, and fatherland, are symbols of blessed meaning, words less sacred only than those which speak of heaven and God—to you there will be a cold shadow, a sense of utterest and extremest desolation, when you think of homelessness, which can hardly be put into language. Sad are the visions which the thought calls up before you. You seem to see the wreck of some fair human thing who has lost the jewel of her womanhood, whom wolfish lust has cast upon society, and who lives to waylay society in furtherance of her terrible revenge. You see her—eyes sunken and cheeks hectic with intemperance—flitting along under the beetling eaves, gliding alternate from the dazzling dram-shop to the dark arches of congenial obscurity; or perhaps you follow her fugitive steps, stealthy as a guilty thing's—as she speeds

[1] Robertson.

"Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river,
With many a light,
From garret to basement,
From window and casement,
And stands with amazement,
Houseless by night."

Oh, is it not a case for heart-break? especially when you think that this lost one once wore the comely snood of maidenhood, and carolled free and happy as the bird beneath the dear recompense of a mother's smile. But what is every sinner, what are you, if you are at this moment alien from Christ, but homeless in the world? When the storm comes, whither can you flee for shelter? Beneath the world's cold arches? You may drip, and drench, and shiver, but hardly shelter there. In the world's lighted halls of pleasure? Ay, while you have money and means; but when you have spent all, they turn you into outer darkness, let the storm howl ever so wildly. Look into the future, *your* future—the future which must come. How dark it is! No prospect! How endless it is! No rest! A homeless spirit! Oh, of all calamities that can afflict me, of all vials of wrath which can be poured out upon my head, surely there can be none of more concentrated and appalling bitterness than this thought of a soul without a home. There is, again, the thought of *waste and degradation.* He "wasted his substance." "He joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." How is the fine gold become dim, and the grace of the fashion of it perished! and how close and natural

the sequence! First the roystering prodigal, then the spendthrift swineherd; first the real degradation, in the waste of the property and of the time, then the apparent degradation, an occupation not mean in itself, but degrading for the rich man's heir. Every thoughtful mind must be saddened at the contemplation of the waste and degradation which are inseparable from the condition of the sinner. The two, indeed, are twins, and cannot be sundered. It is not necessary that there should be manifest humiliation, some great change of circumstance, some ostentatious fall from a height originally possessed, in order to degrade an individual. That is degraded which is below the intention of its being. There is no degradation in the peasant wielding the flail or whistling at the plough—there is degradation in a monarch, if he be a *roué* and a gambler. There has been true royalty in a cottage—there has been sottish vileness on a throne. There is always sadness in the contemplation of ruin. Amid the broken columns of Baalbec or Palmyra, shapeless heaps, where once proud cities stood; in some desolate fane, with the moonlight shining ghostly into crypt and cloister, the mind dwells regretfully upon the former time, when the hum of men broke lively on the listening ear, or through the long aisles there swept the cadence of some saintly psalm. We gaze mournfully upon a deserted mansion, with the sky looking clear upon its crumbling masonry or naked rafters—the tall, dank grass in the court-yard, which once echoed to the hoof of the baron's charger—the garden, erst kept so trimly, now a bloomy wilderness of weeds and flowers, and trailing languidly over the blackening

walls the ivy, that only parasite which clings faithfully to ruin. Sadder still is it to look upon the overthrown temple of the human mind, when morbid fancies prey, like so many vultures, on the distempered brain; and when the eye which ought to be kingly in its glances, is dulled in the sullenness of the idiot, or glares in the frenzy of the madman. But to those who are enlightened to understand the true relation of things, and what ought to be their connection with the heavenly, there are sadder sights than these—sights that wake more solemn and passionate mourning—in the moral wastes of the world, and in the debasement of the nature which once bore the image of God. I see wealth, the gift of a good God, and intended to be used for his glory, hoarded by avarice, or lavished in extravagance and sin. I see genius, that regal dower of Heaven to man, grovelling, a pander, among the stews of sensuality, or blaspheming, an atheist, in all the ribaldries of scepticism. I see formalism and indifference, like Herod and Pilate, making truce together that they may slay the Holy and the Just One. I see men—earnest, thoughtful, amiable men—engrossed as eagerly about present advantage as if there were no death to prepare for, and no future to inherit—living for themselves as selfishly as if they had blotted out from the universe its God. I see energy misdirected, passion frantic and triumphing, truth prostrate, error in high and even in holy places, manhood run to waste, the inheritance of immortality bartered for a golden bauble, conscience discrowned and a slave, the Law broken, the Gospel rejected the blood of Jesus trampled on by those for whom it was shed,

and accounted an unholy thing. Oh, brethren! is there not enough in the ruin to bring sorrow even upon an angel's gladness? and should not you, who are yourselves thus degraded—and there are some of you here—arouse yourselves, and throw your whole souls into the search for a refuge against the day of vengeance? for God will surely be avenged upon a nation and upon a people like this.

And then there is, thirdly, *the thought of abandonment and famine.* He "would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." How utter and terrible the destitution! What! friendless? Where are the companions of his debauchery, the flatterers who laughed at his jokes, and drank his wine, and spunged, vile human funguses, upon his reckless liberality? Are they all gone from him—*all?* Is there not one to replenish the bare table, of whose sweepings he would have been formerly glad? And are these thy friendships, thou hollow, painted harlot of a world? "No man gave unto him." And then came the famine, with its sickening hunger, and its tortures of remorse, that wounded spirit which was a still sharper thorn. "And he began to be in want." He, upon whom in childhood's years no breath had blown too rudely; he, whose every want had been anticipated by a wishful tenderness that hardly brooked to slumber; he, whose youth was gay with the holiday promise of a sky without a cloud—he began to be in want. So the famine came. But that dread famine of the soul is drearier, which sated worldlings sooner or later feel. That famine, when the spirit loathes its former food of

ashes, and knows not where is aliment more congenial; when it shudders at the boisterous greeting of its associates in sin, and would give worlds if it could efface from itself those sinful memories which have burnt into the soul like fire. Oh, there are seasons of wretchedness when this gaunt famine comes—this dreary sense of inner hunger—which make existence an intolerable burden. Hear the statesman on the pinnacle of power, when some one wished him a happy new year: "It had need be happier than the last, for I do not remember a single happy day in that." Hear the practised and wary lawyer, who had held the highest prizes of his profession so long, that he became the envy of the aspirants who coveted the seals: "A few weeks will send me to dear Encombe, as a short resting-place between vexation and the grave." Hear the accomplished and valiant soldier, brilliant alike at the dinner-table and in the field: "Many a time when my society was the most courted, I would have given millions, if I had had them, to have had nothing more responsible about me than the soul of that dog." Such are the world's autobiographies, when they are candidly given, of courtiers who have been behind the scenes, and found their tinsel and their hollowness; of infidel wits who have been disgusted with adulation; of poets, consumed with soul-thirst, which passion's Geyser springs had maddened, but could not slake; of emperors who have left the monarchy for the monastery, and have worn the cowl as more fitting than the crown, or who broke their great false hearts in some rocky islet's solitude, racked with the twin maladies of the body and of the soul. Brethren, those of you who

are yet in sin, has the famine come upon you? or have you not quite spent all? If its teeth are not now in your flesh, you need but to go on in your waywardness, and you will feel them soon.

Homelessness, waste, famine—and do you really choose these things when God offers you the banquet, the fortune, the heaven? Why, oh why, will you spend your money "for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." (Isa. lv. 2, 3.) I could almost rejoice, and surely it were no unkindness, that the famine should consume you, if only, like the prodigal, you might be driven back to the Father's house.

X.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—II.

A MIND'S TRANSITION.

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father."—LUKE xv. 17–20.

WE left the prodigal in the far country, degraded and in shame—reaping, in sad harvest from the swift seed himself had sown. Come with me into the far country again; it will not harm you to burn for a while beneath its torrid sun, and there is a sight to see which may well repay our travel. In the world around us there are many interesting objects of study. He whose eyes are open, and whose mind is covetous of knowledge, may find, wherever his footsteps wander, abundant entertainment and delight. Who can think without emotion, intense even to awe, of the grand problem, the endlessly-repeated miracle of *life?* Not only does man live, but nature lives—the elements live, the earth, the air, the woodlands, the waters all swarm with life. There is life in the drop of dew and

in the grain of sand; in the mould which dampens on the crumbling wall; in the phosphoric gleam which plays upon the ocean's wave. Our palaces are built with the skeletons of ancient life; life cradles within life, and is evolved out of life and out of death; and the very parasites which live within the living have often their parasites—"little animated miracles, claiming their modicum of nourishment that they may develop and exist." How wonderful all this is! and yet how much more wonderful the history of one human heart! Look at that world where thought is active and where feeling glows, where reason and passion meet and clash, and combat, now languid in the slumber of the sated senses, now thrilled with quickest pulses of desire. To read its mysteries, to study its changes, to understand its relations to itself, to the external world, to its fellows, to its God—to mark its action amid some surge of circumstances, or under the play and sweep of influences which aim to control it—how interesting and how profitable the endeavour! Surely, in subordination to things higher, and whose sacredness may not be disputed, there is truth in the often-quoted assertion of the poet, that "the proper study of mankind is man." Again, what interest attaches to a battle-field, if on it was decided the destiny of a nation, or if the overthrow of some colossal ambition had made it a holy shrine of liberty! How the eye glistens as it hears the tale of conflict, gazes upon the heights which daring valour scaled, or the covert from whose friendly shade the panting ranks swept breathless on the foe—how the whole scene is pictured on the fancy, as if we were compassed by the

smoke of war, and heard the din of musketry, and felt the clash of arms! Brethren, our business to-day is with a human heart, in which there raged a battle fiercer than all strife of hostile armies, a battle whose issues were more decisive and important than when combatants make truce, and tired contests end. The analysis of the process by which the revolution was effected in the nature of the prodigal must surely be interesting; for our own hearts have been, each of them, the arena of the same conflict, and the war is against a common enemy.

In the meditation upon the passage, we cannot forbear, in the first place, the reflection, that so rooted is the heart's enmity to God, that man must often be driven, as by the blast of a tempest, to submission and to duty. The prodigal must suffer beneath want, and shame, and abandonment before he thinks on his ways, and turns longingly to the house of his Father. How often is it that the consequences of crime—the disease, the misery, the remorsefulness which wait upon the track of sin, though in themselves sequences of a purely natural law —are used of God as means to impression and salvation! Some flippant infidels have remarked upon the frequency of this, and in their small way have scoffed at a religion which they represented to be the offspring of disgust and of satiety—the resource of a spirit bankrupt of enjoyment, and which has wrung for itself the last solitary husk of pleasure. But that must be a distorted and malignant spirit which could make light of such a merciful provision. Even were it true, which it is not, that all men become prodigal before they are penitent, and must be taught by personal and painful

experience the vanity of the world, and its worthlessness to satisfy the wants of one immortal spirit, who does not see that there is proof in this at once of God's yearning for his creatures' highest happiness, and of the exquisite loving-kindness which he has revealed in the Gospel of his Son? To have so framed man's nature, that he is susceptible of being influenced to consideration and repentance by the very penalties which follow and brand his sin, is itself a token of compassion which is manifest to all but the callous and the blind. And oh! there is a riches of tender mercy in the thought that God will accept of a penitence, if it be but sincere, that is ever so lately rendered; and that even the cry of a bruised heart, wincing beneath a thousand disappointments, jaded from the fruitless labours of a wasted lifetime, shall not come up before the throne in vain. Let no sinner, in that perversity of mischief which would distil poisons from a herbal, turn this grace of God into licentiousness, and "sin that grace may abound." There is no Gospel invitation for any moment but the present one; and the often-reproved hardener of his neck, because he spurned the rebuke, and rooted himself in his wickedness, "shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." If the monitors have spoken to you —if sorrow, and disappointment, and shame have tracked your unguided footsteps, and like weird avengers have broken in upon your desperate repose—oh, listen to their warnings while there is time. The Spirit will not always strive through these, or any messengers. Delay, and the cloud of doom may burst, and the vial of God's wrath be full.

You must not suppose that the mind of the prodigal came at once, in sudden revulsion, from heedlessness to serious thought, and from obduracy to tender and softened feeling. There would be, in all probability, in accordance with the laws of mental working, several preliminary stages. The earliest feelings would still partake of the character of resistance and rebellion. An awakened conscience, that is not pacified, only exasperates into more audacious rebellion. An active desire after things forfeited or forbidden chafes the spirit, as the rock, which does not hinder the stream, but impels it in more passionate tide. When the bewilderment which God has mercifully appointed to dull the first shock of sorrow had passed away, and the prodigal awoke to realize his condition—alone, unfriended, penniless, a stranger—the first tendencies of the mind—unregenerate, and without any true knowledge, as it was—would be towards the sullenness of despair, and the second, perhaps, towards the blasphemies of bootless anger. Both these are natural to a condemning conscience, which has not been told of the divinely troubled waters of some pool of healing. And into these refuges of lies what multitudes of sinners flee! Let me probe into your own conscience, as, standing in this far country, you view the wreck of manhood on whose history we dwell. Are you not conscious that you have reposed often in some dread thought of Fatalism, and resigned yourselves in sullen fretfulness to consequences which your own imprudence or impiety had brought on? Have you not felt embittered by the very discipline which was intended to subdue you? have you not revolted more and more under

the chastenings of the rod? Have not your passions been inflamed, and your enmity increased in bitterness, by the rankling soreness with which you have writhed under your present punishment, and by the boding horror which presented a more fearful one to come? Oh, there can be no greater curse than unsanctified suffering! Until the lion is tamed, he is more furious in the cage than in the forest; his roar is fiercer for his bondage, and the stamp of his foot and the lash of his tail against his den are displays of wilder passion than when he roamed his native wilds. Many a man, whom shame has only maddened into more frantic resistance, walks the earth to-day a moral Laocoon, stung in a living martyrdom by the serpents which in his bosom lodge. It is hardly credible how much, not only of human sadness, but of human sin, has sprung from the soul's first passionate recoil against detected criminality, or blasted reputation, or enforced penalty, or stained honour. When remorse scourges, it is not, like Solomon, with whips, but, like Rehoboam, with scorpions; and the intolerable anguish of a wounded spirit has prompted to many a deed of violence, from which, before his passions were hounded into madness by a guilty conscience, the man would have shrunk with loathing and with horror. Hath the murderer a witness of his crime? Then the remorseful conscience whispers that, for safety's sake, that witness too must die. Doth the good man of the house awake while the burglaer are rifling his treasure? doth the child's eye gaze unwittingly upon a deed of shame? is the dread secret, locked for so long in the guilty bosom, in some tell-tale hour betrayed? Then the conscience, unheeded

till it has become imbruted, will goad the passions into some fouler enormity of evil. Oh, when evil passions and an evil conscience seethe in the same caldron, who can image or create a deeper hell? The sullen despondency, with which the prodigal would strive to reconcile himself to his fate, would mingle with oft-repeated curses pronounced upon his adverse destiny, rather than his own folly. By the licence which thought gives us, we may go into those dreary chambers of his heart—we may hear its moaning, as it frets against the realities of its condition, even as the lone wave moans painfully upon the cold and listening shore. "Well, it is over—the worst has come at last. It has threatened long, and there have been many dark prophecies of the end. I am ruined! That brief revel of my life!—ah, how I hate the memory! Why did God make me thus? Why was the blood so hot in my veins, that quiet happiness, such as I used to have, seemed all too dull and slow? How contented these swine feed! They limit their desires, and are happy in their limitation. They were never other than they are; but I—curses on the knaves that fawned upon me! curses on my own folly that fed itself upon their glozing lies! is there not one of them that cares for me?—not one that throws a thought after the man he helped to ruin? Be still, thou asking heart!—bind the girdle tighter, that will keep the hunger down! Ah! my table is soon spread! Husks! husks! husks!—bring the courses in! How dainty for the pampered servants that once stood behind my chair! Well, I'll brave it all. What! yield to bow myself, a pitiful mendi-

cant, where hearts have leaped to welcome the most honoured guest they had! No! never! Ah! if my father could but see me now! No! I cannot go back to be the butt of the servants' scorn, and to writhe under the contemptuous pity of my sleek and jealous brother, and to meet the justly offended glances of my father's eye. Better anything than that! Better these brute swine—these desolate fields—this lonely, savage isolation from the human—the drudgery of this purse-proud citizen! Nay, if the worst come to the worst—and these hollow cheeks and sunken eyes seem to show me the shadow of the end—I can but fold the robe over my broken heart and die!" Brethren, do you deem this a picture overwrought—that the shadows are laid on too thickly—that there breathes no man with soul so dead? Ah! there are thousands upon thousands who are thus steeling themselves against the convictions of God's Holy Spirit; and it may be that there are some before me, who, if I could but summon them hither, and constrain to candour, and ask to tell, each for himself, the story of his own bitterness, and pride, and struggle, would confess in your hearing that the half hath not been told.

But all this was but the swathing grave-cloth out of whose folds the new man was to rise—the gathering of the dark and angry cloud which was soon to be dissolved in showers, and on whose bosom the triumphant sun would paint the iris by and by. That ever-present Spirit, who strives with men to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, was doubtless all the while at work upon the prodigal's heart; and

when he works, out of the brooding storm come the calm and the zephyr of the summer-tide—out of the death of enjoyment the rare blessedness which is the highest good—out of the death-working sorrow of the world the repentance which is unto life eternal.

We know not precisely how the change was effected from the hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word and commandment, to the softening of thought and contrition. Perhaps the Divine Spirit wrought by the power of memory, thawed the ice away from the frosted spirit by sunny pictures of the past—by the vision of the ancestral home—of the guileless childhood—of the father's ceaseless strength of tenderness—of the spell of a living mother's love, or of the holier spell of a dead one. God does often work by these associations of subtle and powerful energy, and none may limit the Holy One of Israel; but the distinction between the prodigal in his riot and the prodigal in his repentance was so marked and definite, as to leave no doubt of the reality of his change. Disposition, purpose, tendency, all were transformed. He had come under another influence, which had changed the whole bent of his desire, and which had given a new direction to every footstep of his course.

This thorough change in heart and feeling must come upon every penitent sinner; and the consciousness of it must necessarily attend us in every Godward movement of the soul. "That home, which once glowed for me with many-lighted windows of welcome, how sadly and deservedly forfeited! That father, who has daily loaded me with benefit, and whose unutterable love has spared for me neither effort nor sacrifice,

how sorely have I grieved him! That life, with all its treasure of majestic and manifold endowment, how utterly have I wasted it! Those sins, which estranged me from my youth's affections, and drove me to this heritage of foreign shame, how I abhor them now! That pride and unbelief, which have embittered my transgressions and hindered my return, how gladly would I trample them beneath my feet, wending homeward, and drown their memory, as I fall on my father's neck, in floods of contrite tears!" Something of this must every penitent feel—a loathing of his former self, a self-accusing fidelity which will not dissemble its impieties—a hatred, not only of the smart of sin, but of its substance—the yearning of a deeply-wounded spirit, which longs for reconciliation to the God and Father from whom it has become so wilfully estranged. Brethren, are these feelings yours? Are you conscious that an influence has swept over you, working this bloodless revolution? Do you wonder, in awe, as you reflect upon your former peril—in gratitude, as you reflect upon your marvellous deliverance? Oh, if you have yielded to the Spirit's power, and felt the godly grief, at once heart-breaking and healing, you will not give stint to your devotion, nor be languid and measured in your service of the Lord. Yours will be a sense of obligation so deep and overwhelming, that it will constrain from you both the praise of the lip which knows not how to hush its doxologies, and the life's more constant and worthy hosanna.

If we look at the prodigal after he has yielded to the influence which has come down upon him from

above, we see an order of being essentially different from the one on which we a while ago gazed. The external circumstances are much the same: the landscape is still sterile; the swine still feed; the man still stands, solitary, and unfriended, and hungering; but he is not the same. He was defiant then; he is disconsolate now. The stern in his nature has been succeeded by the softened and the sad. Then he glared insanely round him, an utter rebel against the right, and shook his puny fist against the omnipotence which overcame him; now he smites, not the innocent air, but his own guilty breast, in whose sin he has learned to discover the secret of the sorrow and the shame. He is a thousandfold a truer man now, ragged and hungry as he is, than when he sotted in the boisterous wassail or the long carouse. Then he was the wealthy and the heedless, whose habits had become imbruted as the swine's; now he is the swineherd, already kindling with the hopes and struggling into the aspirations of the man.

There are just three points suggested in the narrative which we may notice for a moment. It was a transition *from madness to reason, from sullen pride to submission and acknowledgment, from despondency to determined and immediate endeavour.* It is no word of man, but the word of inspiration, which has declared the insanity of a sinner, and that he "comes to himself" when he thinks upon his ways and is wise. And all the habits in which the sinner is wont to indulge answer to the habits and delusions of those who have been bereft of reason, or in whom it has been deposed from its rightful government of the man.

Madness is rash and inconsiderate action—action without thought of consequences. The madman's hand is sudden in its violence; the madman's tongue shoots out its barbed arrows; he is reckless of the slain reputation, or of the murdered life; and is not like rashness a characteristic of the sinner? Little recks he of his own dishonour, or of the life that he has wasted in excess of riot. He goes heedlessly on, though his every step were up the crater's steep, and mid the crackling ashes. Madness is mistake of the great purposes of life; the employment of the faculties upon objects that are contemptible and unworthy. Hence you see the lunatic intently gazing into vacancy, or spending hours in the eager chase of insects on the wing, or scribbling, in strange medley of the ribald and the sacred, scraps of verse upon the torn-out pages of a Bible. And are there not greater degradations in the pursuits which engross such multitudes of the unconverted? Are there not thousands who waste their lives in habits which spring from no thought, and lead to no result—habits compared with which, as has been well said, "there is activity in the life of a zoophyte, and earnestness in the eccentricities of a swallow"? Madness is the fostering of morbid delusions which mount upon the brain unbidden; the undue predominance of distempered fancy, which can invert all laws, and bring the impossible to be the actual in a moment at its regal bidding. You can see the lunatic—an imaginary king—with a wondrous sense of realness, and with a courtly bearing, happily unconscious, finding that "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." And such is "the

blindness of heart which has happened" unto a world of sinners, that they deem themselves kingly, when, alas! they are sadly dishonoured, and exult in the distemper of a delirious freedom, when they are "led captive by the devil at his will." In all circumstances of human transgression, varied only by the several modifications of the disease, there is truth in the declaration of the Scripture, "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

From this state of madness the contrite prodigal has emerged; formerly rash and thoughtless, he has begun to consider, and consideration is the sworn enemy of levity, and the fruitful parent of high purposes in the soul; formerly warped by a mistaken view of life, and led by erroneous judgment into corrupt and vicious practice, he has been awakened to juster perceptions of duty, and to a right valiant endeavour to discharge it; formerly inflated with notions of a fictitious dignity, and eaten up with the pride of position or of possessions, he has now humbler, and therefore truer, views of himself, and sees himself the fouler because of his exalted lineage, just as a prince of the blood royal is most of all men traitorous to his rank and destiny when he companies with harlots and with thieves. When a sinner comes to himself, he blushes for his former frenzy; he feels himself a child of the Divine; he feels himself an heir of the eternal; and, looking with a strange disdain upon the things which formerly trammelled him, he lifts heavenward his flashing eye, and says, "There is my portion and my home." Now, with the Beulah-land before him, he wonders that the

mirage of life should have so long deluded him, and in the serenity of present peace can hardly believe that he should ever have found a charm in the turbulence of passion, or in the glare of pleasure. Heaven and earth are now seen by him in their true relations—heaven the throne, earth the footstool—heaven the recompense, earth the probation. He has learned not to despise this world, nor to undervalue its joys, when they are properly estimated. A savage recluse, or an envious and disappointed worldling, may do that. *He* would have done it in that savage mood of defiance which has just swept over him like a storm; but he has been taught, at the feet of Jesus, a kindlier and more human lore. He pities the world, not slanders it; he could weep for the sin which has defiled its beauty, and for the cruel scars which tell of outrage and of wrong; and enjoying with a rapturous gratitude its gladness, and enduring with faith's deep submission its portion of trial, he stands in his lot until the end of the days, never forgetful of the brighter world beyond—ripening by the privileges of the present into a mellow preparation for the future, and then, like good old Simeon, his dying breath a blessing, he departs in peace to heaven.

There is a transition again, *from pride to submission and acknowledgment.* In his former mood of mind he only intensified his own rebellion, and was ready, doubtless, to blame circumstances, or companions, or destiny, or anything rather than his own wickedness and folly. "All things have conspired against me; never, surely, had any one so hard a lot as I. I might not have been exactly prudent now and then, but I

have done nothing to merit such punishment as this. I will never confess that I have done wrong; if I were to return to my father, I would not abate a hair's-breadth of my privileges; I would insist—and it is right, for am I not his son?—upon being treated precisely as I was before." So might have thought the prodigal in his pride. But in his penitence no humiliation is too low for him- –no concealment nor extenuation is for a moment entertained; with the expectation, not of sonship, but of servitude, and with the frank and sorrowful acknowledgment of sin, he purposes to travel, and to cast himself at the feet of his father. The penitential sorrow has trampled out the pride, and, instead of being prepared to dictate terms, he would submit cheerfully to the meanest lot, and to the most protracted trial, and to the coldest welcome, if only he may be permitted to reside in the old house at home. This humility is characteristic of all true contrition. As pride was one of the deadly sins by which our first parents fell, the whole provision of God's mercy, and every rescript and every promise of our religion, are framed, as with one common purpose, to hide pride from man. The Scriptures declare, with an earnestness of repetition which the occasion justifies, that salvation cannot be achieved by the holiest human-living; nor does meritoriousness attach to the most scrupulous observance of the law. As all—from the smiling babe upon the proud mother's knee, and the youth secluded, in the rural home, from the contagion of the city's leprosy, up to the sa.age nurtured in cruelty, and the bronzed perpetrator of a thousand crimes—have been born in sin and shapen in iniquity,

so all are equally helpless to secure their own acceptance, or to maintain themselves for one brief moment in the consistency of spiritual living. There is no room for pride in any solitary human bosom. Once he was a sinner reckless in his sins, and with a high hand vaunting himself in his wickedness; now he is but a sinner saved by grace; he never grows into a sanctity which is independent of Divine assistance; and if it were to happen for him to continue until there shone from him the glory of old age faithfully relying upon God, and then in some moment of garrulous vanity to loosen his hold of the sustaining arm, in that moment he would stumble and fall. Oh, bid your pride avaunt! harbour it not for an instant in your bosom, for it and the carnal security which it engenders are the flatterer's most successful snares. The safest path to the City of Habitations is not by the mountain bridle-path, overhung by the loosened cliff, and overhanging the deep ravine, nor yet along the icy track of the glacier's glittering peril; it winds along the green pastures where still waters flow, and to the very slopes of the hill on which the city stands, "through the low vale of humble love."

And then, just in a word, there is the transition *from despondency to active and hopeful endeavour:* "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father." There is not only the mental process, but the corresponding action—the rousing of the soul from its indolent and tormenting despair.

This is one main difference between the godly sorrow and that consuming sadness which preys upon the heart of the worldling: the one disinclines, the other prompts to action; the one broods over its own haplessness until it wastes and dies, the other cries piteously for help, and then exults in deliverance and blessing. There was something more than fable in the old mythology which told of Pandora's box—a very receptacle of ills made tolerable only because there was hope at the bottom. In every true contrition there is hope. What! despair? Nay, though you were never such an arrant prodigal; nay, though you are wrinkled in iniquity, and your hoary head, so far from being a crown of righteousness, is a very brand of shame; nay, though you stood upon the loosening earth by the pit's mouth, and heard the yell of demon voices and the dance of demon feet. Despair is no word for this world's languages; despair has no right to a foot of land on this ransomed planet's territory; its kingdom is not of this world, but of the world beneath and to come. We may leave the prodigal without shuddering; he will be no worse when we come to him again. The evils of his pride and defiance were those he had most to dread; he has parted with these, and we see him, subdued and earnest, travelling homeward with a royal hope within his soul.

XI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—III.

THE JOY OF RETURN.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."—LUKE xv. 20–24.

THERE are two kinds of minds of whose opinions we have been informed, touching the relative importance of this world to other worlds, all being provinces in the same moral empire—the one is the mind of the infidel, the other is the mind of the angel. As a matter of course, they represent the extremes of sentiment, and are as widely apart from each other as might be the descriptions of the same landscape given by two men, the one of whom had dimly seen it for a moment, as he woke up from a slumber in a fast train; the other of whom, from some heathery slope or upland, had drunk in its beauty with ample leisure and with a broad sweep of vision. When the infidel thinks of

this world, even if he is so much of a believer as to admit its fall, he looks at it with narrow sympathies; wrapt in his own selfishness, he cannot conceive of the nobility which would yearn with pity over some revolted province, and which would visit a scene of insurrection, not to destroy the rebels, but to pardon them; nay, he cannot even conceive of a vigilant tenderness, so comprehensive that it can govern a universe of worlds with as perfect a recognition of the minute, as of the magnificent in each, and so unfailing that it is moved by no rebellion from its benevolent design. Hence the great facts of man's sin and ransom—of God's providence, caring for this world, the sickly, and the erring; and of God's grace stooping to replace it in its orbit—finding as they do no precedent in his own emotions, and evoking no response from the depths of his own consciousness, are treated by the sceptic as a delusion of fanaticism rather than as a reality of faith. He cannot believe that that man, as insignificant in comparison with the planet whose surface he scarcely specks, as the one crystal to the avalanche, or the one bubble, with its mimic rainbow, to the torrent waters of Niagara, can be even looked at in the administrations of the great economy, much less that all his concerns and all his interests are noted as carefully as if there were no other on the earth beside him. He cannot believe that of all worlds which sun themselves in their Creator's smile, this reckling world which has strayed should be the object of especial graciousness, and that for its deliverance there should have been struck out of the heart of goodness a scheme of compassion unparalleled in the universe before.

This is a knowledge altogether too wonderful and a belief altogether too high to have a home in an infidel's bosom. And yet these very facts are to the angels matters both of interest and of joy. These glorious beings, "full of eyes" to gather and observe all knowledge, and with large hearts of charity, vibrate, although of alien nature, to each chord of human struggle and conquest; to them it is but matter of higher praise, that throughout the universe, and even into its very ravines and cells of being, there penetrate the glances of that eye whose brightness they must veil themselves to see; to them the grace which leaves the loyal worlds to condescend to the succour of the shrouded one is the rarest grace of all; and to angelic eyes, in the wondrous scheme of earth's redemption by the offering of the Divine Substitute, there is a perpetual mystery, into which they still desire to look, and where to their enraptured study the whole Deity is known.

Not merely on the God-ward side do these facts excite their adoration, but on the man-ward side their sympathy. They have watched, you remember, over this our world from the beginning; they sang together at its birth; they revelled in the beauty of the young Eden, and strayed at dewy eve by the paths where its blest inhabitants wandered; they shuddered beneath sin's cold shadow, and grieved over the blight and the departure of the innocence they had loved so well. Hence they have known our world in all its fortunes; and just as an elder brother, of a benevolent heart, might heap caresses upon the infant born when he was old enough "to move about the house with joy, and with the certain step of man," finding endearment

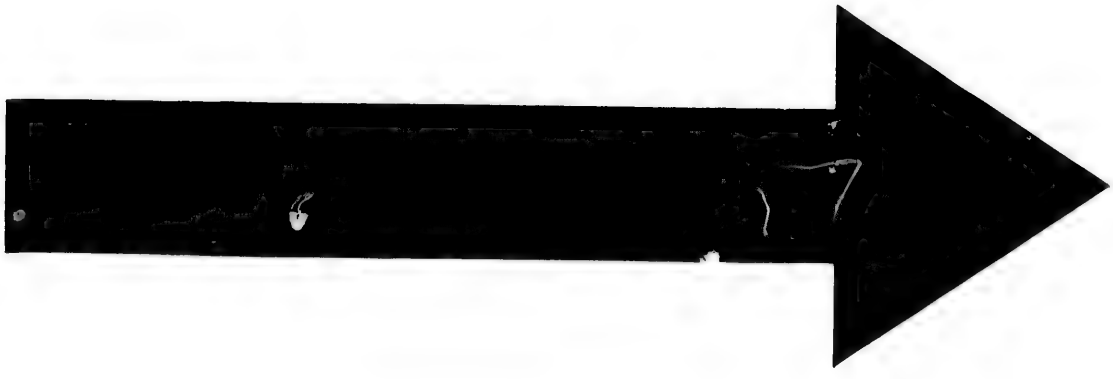
in its very helplessness; so those holy angels, bright in the radiance of their first estate, have quick sensibilities for all human welfare still; and whenever the sinner is arrested in his course, or the penitent cry is heard, or the prodigal, in his far country, turns a homeward glance of soul, there comes a hush upon their harping, only to be succeeded by a burst of more rapturous music, "for there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

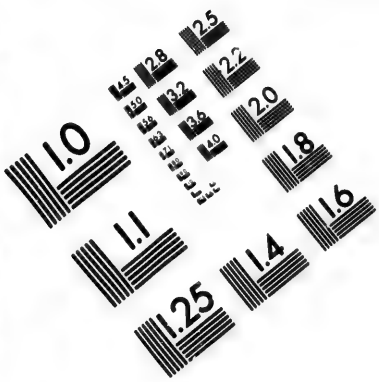
Your feeling, brethren, as you come with me to dwell upon the prodigal's return, will be, if you feel rightly, such as neither the sceptic nor the angel can compass; for you will have the proper sympathy which neither of them possesses—the sceptic, because he has divorced himself from the wedlock between Humanity and Faith; the angel, because he

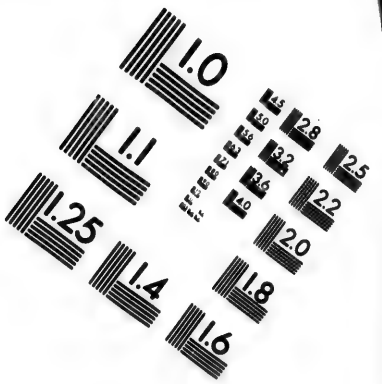
> "Never felt above
> Redeeming grace nor dying love."

To you it will but re-enact, in one phase or other of our meditation on it, a chapter in your own history. You will be saddened by the chill thought of present alienation, or thrilled by the memory of your own home-travel after years of estrangement and of sin.

We left the prodigal in the far country, but penitent, changed, resolute in the purpose to return to the house of his father. As we follow him on his journey, we can trace and sympathize with the mingling of feelings in his soul. There is not remorse—for remorse is the consciousness of guilt without the hope and prayer for mercy; and all those dark emotions have gone from him, swept out of his soul when the







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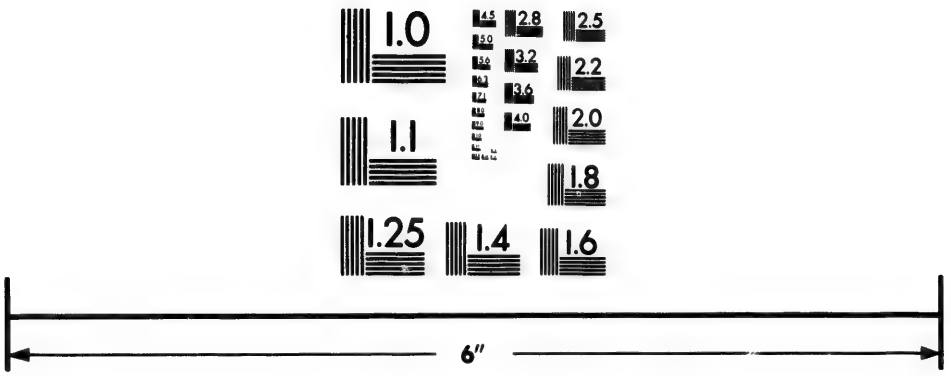

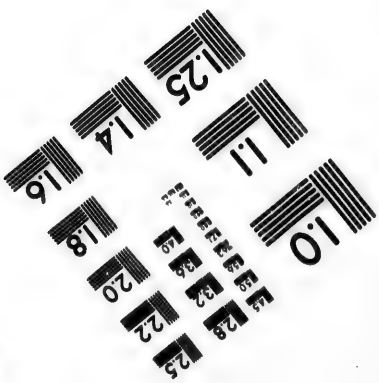

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fountains of its great deep broke up, by the intensity of their passionate flood—but there is deep sorrow for the past; there is unfeigned sense of humiliation; there is that compunctious sensitiveness of conscience which never can itself forgive. Then memory is busy, and upon his pained fancy she pictures the home-scenes of the happy past—the first sad hour of lawlessness when he sped into the far country, flushed with the new sense at once of wealth and freedom—and the utter worthlessness of those wild joys compared with the earlier and serener ones, seen dimly in the vanishing perspective. Then anxiety is busy, and she projects her wonder into the nearing future, and speculates upon the probabilities of his reception. "Shall I be spurned from the door, or clasped to the heart? Will there be added to all my sufferings the humiliation of rejected penitence? Will the father, whose lifelong kindness I have so ungratefully repaid, refuse to listen to my distress, and leave me to reap in bitter harvest the consequences of my folly? I am weary and sunken now; this hunger is a strange enfeebler—my limbs are supported only by a trembling hope of welcome. Shall I be shut out at last—shipwrecked at the harbour's mouth—left to die on the threshold of the home?" These are no comfortable feelings, but they are the servitude of the mind, to which sin compels its victims. Even when they have turned their backs upon its service, the iron has entered into their soul, and they feel the fretting of the chain which they drag behind them on their way to Christ.

We have spoken of the prodigal's possession of a

hope, and you can easily imagine how, during the whole of this storm-tossed journey, hope would be the anchor of the soul. It is indeed the essential element of his repentance—the conservative principle which keeps the spirit alive—which restrains the frantic tears, or makes them scald no longer as they flow—which animates the desire that would else languish, and stimulates the flagging steps which weary doubt so often makes to halt and stumble. "We are saved by hope," says the Apostle; and there is a sense in which it is true of us all—we are saved by hope before we are saved by faith. The hope of mercy is in itself a thing in which the good Lord "taketh pleasure." The hope of Christ is a staff in the hand of the weary, before the arm of Christ is stretched out on which he may be privileged to lean. Hope is a marvellous inspiration, which every heart confesses in some season of extremest peril. It can put nerve into the languid, and fleetness into the feet of exhaustion. Let the slim and feathery palm-grove be dimly descried, though ever so remotely, and the caravan will on—spite of the fatigue of the traveller, and the simoom's blinding—to where, by the fringy rootlets, the desert-waters flow. Let there glimmer one star through the murky waste of night, and though the spars be shattered and the sails be riven, and the hurricane howls for its prey, the brave sailor will be lashed to the helm, and see already, through the tempest's breaking, calm waters and a spotless sky. Let there be but the faintest intimation that all is not utterly hopeless, "when the grave and skilled physician by the trembling patient stands," and anxious love

will redouble its watching, and feel as if new feet had been given to the leaden hours; and the blood, which had begun to curdle, as if in sympathy with the dying, will flutter itself loose again into thankful and regular flow. Oh, who is there, however hapless his lot or forlorn his surroundings, who is beyond the influence of this choicest of earth's comforters—this faithful friend which survives the flight of riches, and the wreck of reputation, and the break of health, and e'en the loss of dear and cherished friends? My brethren, I would fain rouse you all to the exercise of this your undoubted privilege in those higher matters which are between yourselves and God. Are you disquieted because of sin?—then you may hope. Are you guilty of transgressions which you feel to be both heinous and aggravated?—then you may hope. Are you conscious that yours have been sins of no common type of turpitude, towering above the guilt of ordinary sinners as the mountain above the lake which mirrors it?—still you may hope. Have you been a champion for evil, and trampled upon grace, and been both an adept and a teacher of ungodliness, and gone so recklessly on your hell-ward travel, that you feel as if brain and heart were already scorched by its consuming fire?—still there is hope—nay, hope! there is certainty—that if in right earnest you will begin at this moment, and, in penitence for past sin, and in purpose of future holiness, set about the seeking for salvation, no power on earth can hinder—the whole army of demons cannot hinder—and the gracious God who calls you would, if it were necessary, unclasp the arms of Satan, which were already closing round you,

and make the fires of torment lambent, lest one hair of your head should be singed by the devouring flame.

Now let us leave the prodigal a while; or rather, let us precede him on his journey: you have been too long detained, perhaps, on the melancholy sight of ruin. The same licence of thought which showed us the anatomy of the ruined man's heart, will privilege us equally, and make us free of the house of his father. As we gaze upon the ample board, and fruitful acres, the purple vine climbing up the trellis, the lowing herd folded in the stalls, golden sheaves in the barn, sunny faces round the hearth; thrift hoarding for generosity, order ministering to comfort, a common interest and a mutual love, we do not wonder at those glorious tints which the sharpened fancy of the prodigal drew. It is a sweet spot, surely. "If there be an Elysium on earth, it is this," with its days of happy toil and its nights of earned repose. There are many such homes on earth, brethren, where there seems so little of the palpable curse, and so much of the lingering blessing, that we are fain sometimes to cling to them too closely, and our hearts would build their tabernacles on these Tabors or Hermons of their love. But who may say that any of them is happy? that there is any house without an apparition on its landing? that there are not secret griefs which gnaw the heart of wealth, and blanch the cheek of beauty; anxieties kept barred in each spirit, where the world may not intrude, and where even friends adventure not, but which are sapping the comfort and shortening the days? Take the case before us. Surely there can be no interruption to the happiness here. Com-

petence, consideration, faithful servants, a well-regulated household, a dutiful son, all that the eye can covet or the heart can wish — is there a skeleton in this house too? Is there here some restless memory, interred in the grave of the long ago, but which will walk the earth notwithstanding? Ah! why those anxious glances when the wind makes the cedars groan, and against the lattice beats the frightened rain? why that sudden shade, fitful, pensive, almost moody, which gathers so often upon the lord of the mansion's brow? why that gaze across the stretching fields when the brief twilight sombres up the sky? Oh, there is a name banished from the lips, but not blotted from the hearts, of that household; they are all thrilled full often as by one sad impulse, and each can tell the thought that is present in the mind of the other; it is of that absent son and brother, who has forfeited his place in the circle, who has disgraced the family name, and "broken the crown of their pride," but for whom in the ear of Heaven countless prayers are breathed, and over whom in the watching night the big tears thickly fall. Day after day, in that father's kindly heart, the memory of wrong dies out, and the memory of the early promise and "the winsome look of grace" alone remains. Day after day the tide of love flows stronger and faster toward the erring one, and the dream of his return is cherished, until it becomes a habit to strain the eyes for his coming; and because the hush of the eventide is not broken by his remembered footstep, the father's heart is pained, and he gathers himself to his slumbers with a sigh. If that prodigal, whom we left behind

us, did but know all this; if the yearnings of parental affection, and the willingness of parental pardon, were but as clear to him as they are to us, what a change would come upon the aspect of his thought and feeling!—how it would put wings into his feet, and light up the haggard countenance, so downcast now and sad! My hearers, it is for you these pictures are drawn, not that you may simply gaze as in a gallery, but that you may be profoundly impressed with the lessons which they are painted to teach. God, the eternal Jehovah, is the Father who thus yearns over the salvation of you, his sinning children. In himself, of course, he is essentially and eternally happy, and, as an indivisible Spirit, has no body, parts, nor passions; in so far, therefore, the parallel fails; but in condescension to your infirmity he has represented himself as clothed with all the sensibilities of the human father, liable to be grieved by your apostasy, to be angered by your obstinate unbelief, and to long after your recovery with intense desire. So sacred is that immortal image of himself within you—that grand power of choice which constitutes your moral freedom—that with *that* he will not interfere; but, short of any compulsion which involves a necessity of obedience, so infinite is his willingness to save you, that he will ply you with many arguments, persuade you by powerful motives, surround you with a hedge of circumstance, woo your heart in whispers to his service, arouse your fears by startling providences, excite your hopes by loads of daily mercies, and endeavour, by all possible means of appeal which possess with you either tenderness or power, to allure you home.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." He did not wait until the prodigal had knocked at the door, and been subjected to the servants' wonder; he did not wait for the low prostration, and for the abject and servile sorrow; there was no standing upon a sort of etiquette of morals, no drawing of the cloak of dignity round until every punctilious requirement of orthodox penitence had been fulfilled, and then relaxing to grant the self-abased request, and to speak cold words of pardon. All this would have been just, inflexibly just; and the prodigal who had been thus treated would have had no cause of complaint, but rather much ground of thankfulness. We must take care that we are not spoiled by God's mercy, and tempted by his unparalleled compassion to think lightly and superficially of sin. Sin is a foul evil, and "when it is finished it bringeth forth death." Just as there ensues spontaneous combustion from the decomposition of certain vegetable substances, so the very foulness of sin bursteth, as by natural sequence, into fire. Fit the very sense we have of the enormous impiety of sin will only enhance our estimate of the boundlessness of grace in its forgiveness. As in all other illustrations by which things Divine are intended to be made known to us, the analogy halts for want of compass and power. To understand aright the early moving of God towards the sinner, we must remember his omniscience, an attribute which of course is wanting in the human father. The Divine eye can track the prodigal through every brake and scaur of the far country into which he has wandered; no debauchery

of his excess of riot is hidden; his defiance and his depression, the steeling and the softening of his soul, are alike open to the glances from which nothing is concealed. He knows, O sinner, that secret deed of darkness, covered up so carefully from human sight, that habit of impurity or fraud, that stern and haughty resistance to his will, which thy soul has indulged through so many rebellious years. He knows, O penitent, thy soul's first yearnings after him, thy struggles against the corruption which yet mastered thee, thy brave upspringing with a new purpose of right even after mortifying failure, thy secret loathing of thy sin, the uneasy clanking of the chain which thou hadst yet no key to open and no strength to snap in sunder. The Father sees thee, though thou art yet a long way off. His compassion goes out to meet thee from the first moment when thy homeward march begins; thy prayers and thine alms come up before him, like those of Cornelius, "for a memorial," though not for a merit; in token of thy sincerity, though not in purchase of thy pardon. Oh, what unspeakable comfort couches in this thought for every contrite heart! Thy pilgrimage need not be with bleeding feet and long endurance to a far-off shrine, a shrine at which the idol abides senselessly, with nor heart to feel nor strength to succour. The word of grace is nigh thee, even in thy heart and in thy mouth. Swift as the hart upon the mountains runs the Father's love to meet and welcome thee. Thou hast been long expected; the home has hardly seemed complete without the erring but unforgotten child. Bruised and hungering as thou art, start thee on the journey; thou shalt

not travel all the way alone; the first part of thy travel may be with sorrowful heart and burdened back, but hie thee to the cross of Jesus. So sure as God's word is true, he will meet thee there, and thy burden shall fall from thy shoulders, and the sadness from thy heart, and thou shalt bound along thy joyous pilgrimage a light-hearted, because forgiven, sinner.

Your impression of God's loving-kindness will be deepened—and that is surely the intention of this pearl of parables—if you pass from the haste with which the prodigal was met to consider the welcome with which the prodigal was greeted. We last saw him wending his way to his father, agitated with a thousand apprehensions, but brave in the doing of what he had recently discovered to be right. He had not only thought upon return, but he had let purpose ripen into deed. There are multitudes who think upon repentance and faith as duties to be some time performed, but who dream about them through the kindly summer-time, and then, when the winter comes, are in the far country, ragged and famine-stricken still; but in the case before us, the action waited promptly on the will. He not only came to himself, but he came to his father. And now they have met—the yearning father and his humbled child. The father saw him first, for his love looked out and his compassion ran; the son came slowly, with downcast eyes, that dreaded the first glimpse of the home which they yet longed unutterably to see. If he sighted the running figure in the distance, and saw as it came near that the form was the venerable one of his father; still more, if his

tumult of emotion allowed him, with a strange thrill of hope, to note the outstretched arms and kindling eye; how must his heart have palpitated with the rushing blood, and the wave of his penitence swelled into a swifter tide! But perhaps he knew not of this; perhaps, overwhelmed with the feelings or oppressed by the fears which mastered him, he saddened on unheeding, until he was roused from his stupor of sorrow by the clasp of his father's arms. Oh, the delight of that first moment of conscious favour! Think of all the raptures of deliverance first realized after imminent peril — the drowning, when the strong swimmer grasps him; the fire-girdled, when from the topmost window the fireman receives the fainting on his safe but slender ladder; the slave, when from the lash, and the swamp, and the branding iron, he leaps on to the frontiers of freedom; the child, when the agonized mother presses him to her bosom, unharmed from the eagle's talons—what are they all to the first gush of rapturous gladness which thrills, in the moment of reconciliation, through the breast of the forgiven sinner? The transition is so marvellous, so startling, that it is all too deep for language. Condemned before! now looking into eyes that glisten with tenderness, and lips that quiver with pardons. Polluted before! now sensible of an inner cleansing. Aimless and without a hope before! now furnished, so to speak, with the principia of a new existence, and strong to work it out with a will. Orphaned in the vast universe before! now conscious of encircling arms and of a living Father. Have you felt it? The rare blessedness, the indefinable thrill, almost startling you, until,

by lapse of time, it became familiar happiness, and you were taught of God to call it by its proper name,

> "That I—a child of wrath and hell—
> *I* should be called a child of God."

Oh, if you have not, God waits to confer it; in Christ it is ready for your faith. The atonement has purchased not only deliverance but adoption for the world, and you, the vilest and the farthest prodigal, may lift your eyes, red with the contrite tears, and call God Father by the Holy Ghost. The love of God to man is never displayed more illustriously than in his reception of the returning sinner. Take the tenderest-hearted father that you know, one of those who are deemed weakly indulgent to a degree incompatible with the proper maintenance of authority, and ask yourselves what his reception would be of a child who had outraged his tenderness, wasted his property, and brought disgrace and scandal upon a name which a long ancestry of integrity had honoured. Alas! such are the strange contradictions of the nature we inherit, that the most blindly indulgent would become the most bitterly implacable, and even in the case of the most forgiving there would be a struggle with pride, and a distant waiting for the full tale of confession, and a reserve, and a hesitancy, and a long probation before full re-instalment into former privilege; and even then, a lurking suspicion and a jealous watchfulness, and now and then the sharp arrows of a keen upbraiding, which would show that the lip's forgiveness of the sinner is far easier than the heart's oblivion of the sin. But not so does God measure his graciousness towards the penitents whom, for Jesus' sake, he accepts and

welcomes to his favour. Not the stern silence, but the warm embrace; not the abhorrent recoil from pollution, but the large charity which at once exalts the abased, and clothes and cleanses the vile; not the ear strained for the listening to the confession, but the kiss which heals the wound and stops the words; not the yoke of servitude, but the ring of affection; not the measured tones and solemn cautions of a judicial acquittal, but the festal feast and the diffusive gladness, as when an heir of broad lands is born. Surely this is unexampled grace, and yet this is the golden sceptre which is stretched out by the monarch to you. A servant! No, but a robe, and shoes, and a ring—and these are not the apparel of slaves: they have serge for garment, and a badge for decoration, and tread with naked feet—but a robe, and shoes, and a ring for the returning prodigal; and thus the Father owns the son.

There is something significant in the thought that the latter part of the prodigal's purposed confession was suppressed in the presence of the father. "Make me as one of thy hired servants" was in his heart in the far country, but not on his lips when he sobbed out his penitence at home; and why was this? It was in his heart still—he felt it to be immeasurably more than he deserved—he would willingly have borne the yoke for life, if only his loving obedience might have shown that he was changed, but he could not further sin against his father's fatherliness; and refusal to accept the sonship which was pressed upon him in the kiss of peace would have been to do that fatherliness dishonour. Take heed, thou penitent, that thou dost

not thus sin to-day. It is well for thee to feel thy humbleness, and, in the sense of thy own demerit, to abase thyself lowly before God; but it is not well to persist in obstinate and wilful unbelief. Thou honourest God by the simplicity and heartiness of thy trust in his promises. It is thy truest duty, as well as thy most surpassing privilege, to be called his son. To despise this high calling is sin in thee, and thou shalt be punished for it as surely as the man who refused the rich robe at the wedding banquet, who was cast to the darkness and the shame.

God welcoming and blessing his erring but now penitent child! And is that sight—visible to the higher intelligences who in heaven throb with human sympathies and recognitions still—visible in this house of prayer? Oh, there can be no sight like that! Before it fade the most gorgeous things that start from canvas or that speak in marble; nothing so rapturous and wonderful ever caught the poet's eye in the rolling of its finest frenzy. Day unto day uttereth no speech so eloquent; night unto night discovereth no secret of such glowing wonder; the deep sea hath no treasure of so rare a preciousness; the winged winds bear no such joyous tidings. It thrills through all the regions of the sentient and the happy. The wings of the seraphim unfold with a newer flutter of gladness. The Divine Son rejoices to see of the travail of his soul; and the everlasting Father, attesting its eternal *fitness*, proclaims to the awed and silent heaven, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad," for this my son "was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

XII.

THE PRODIGAL SON.—IV.

THE DISSENTIENT TO THE COMMON JOY.

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."—LUKE xv. 25–32.

THE instruction of this inimitable parable is not yet exhausted. We left the household amid a scene of apparently universal gladness. The penitence was accepted, the reconciliation was complete; the prodigal, a prodigal no longer, renewed a happiness from which he had been long estranged; the joy spread from heart to heart, and the house rang with the dance-music, that light and tripping carol of joyous song which

young lips warble when skies are bright, and hope has banished care. But from this general satisfaction there now appears to be one dissentient—and as you have seen it often in common life, where the harmony of a party has been thoroughly spoiled by one proud or petulant intruder—the elder son comes in. He has been out in the field, and returning, perhaps, at the punctual meal-time, he marks and wonders at the unwonted festivity which has broken in upon the quiet of his home. When he hears the cause, his annoyance is not abated, but inflamed. He is angry, jealous, upbraiding, proof against the entreaties of his father, and so pertinacious in his offended pride, that he elicits from the father a declaration of the essential rightness of his conduct in the matter of the prodigal, and an implied rebuke of his own disobedience and sin. It will not be amiss for us to inquire —as a pendant to the meditations which have already occupied us—into this problem of character. It may be that, as we look into it, we may start some stray reflection that will encourage or that will condemn ourselves.

It is necessary to remind ourselves that the audience to whom these parables were spoken was a mingled one of Pharisees and publicans; for it seems as though the contempt felt by the despisers had been publicly expressed—expressed in the hearing of the despised—and that the great Teacher willed to weave into his narrative some appropriate instruction for each. It is clear, too, that the immediate purpose which the parables were designed to answer, was the rebuke of the narrowness which murmured because of the welcome

which was given to the publicans and sinners. Hence it is probable that the mass of expositors are right, when they conclude that there is allusion, in the character of the elder son, to the Jew, as distinguished by his affected superiority to the Gentile, and to the Pharisee, as a sort of religious aristocrat among the Jews. Still there are difficulties connected with every exposition. Our object is to extract as much of the gold out of the mine as we may, and that object will be best attained by combining, so far as they involve no contradiction, the various thoughts to which the subject naturally gives rise, and, without aiming at any elaborate construction, to get some harvest of profit from them all.

And, first, *there is something in the state of feeling which we may suppose to have existed in the elder son with which many a perplexed Christian can very largely sympathise.* We may suppose him to have been trained, from his youth, to believe that there was excellency in obedience, and that in every well-ordered household it would be appropriately recognised and rewarded. Just so we are taught that recompense of virtue and punishment of vice are fundamental principles of government; and that Jehovah, the supreme source of government, has declared that he loveth righteousness, and "hateth iniquity as an abominable thing." With these convictions instilled into him, as the early instructions of his childhood, and with the experience which his own family history gave him of the discomfort and impiety of sin, he comes home from his honest industry, and is astonished to perceive lighted windows, and to hear the sound of the harp

and of the tabret swelling through the unaccustomed air. He inquires into the cause, and is told that one has come who is associated in his mind only with ideas of profligacy and shame, and that his return has been hailed with a rapture of revelry, which during long years of quiet service never woke up in the father's house for *him*. Is it not natural that his first thought should be a bewildered wonder? Will not the murmur rise almost involuntarily? Will not the vague idea of natural justice feel as if it were outraged, and the mind shudder as with a flash of consciousness that all is not right somehow in the moral government which sanctions such an anomaly? You can listen, for the heart's voice is audible—"My brother come, and this pageantry of welcome for *him!* His seems to be the licence, and mine the drudgery. He has had a gay career of it, and it seems that his fortune has not forsaken him now. It is very strange! Obedience is not worth the music and the festival. They are reserved for riot and ruin. It seems as though the surest way to my father's heart is to be wild, and wayward, and prodigal. There is no distinction, then, between good and evil, or if there be, the evil has the advantage, for the banquet follows hard on the debauchery, and looks like its wages of reward. 'Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency,' for slights are put upon faithfulness, and premiums offered to sin." Brethren, how many of us are there who recognise the tones of our own fretful wailing under the pressure of some multitude of thoughts which have sorely perplexed our souls? It is no new temptation. Like a

sigh of the wind it swept over hearts in ancient Israel, and to all ages there has been this darkling shadow of a great mystery, beneath which men have groped in painfullest uncertainty, until they could emerge happily into a firm reliance. David felt it when he looked upon the flourishing of the wicked; and it was a thought too painful for him "until" he "went into the sanctuary of God." Job felt it, when disaster followed on disaster, and each dashed a breaker of sorrow upon the strand of his soul. The labourers felt it, who were hired when the dew glittered and the lark sang, because those who wrought but one hour were made equal in remuneration to them, who had borne the burden and heat of the day. We have felt it in commercial life, when a man of small principle has grasped wealth by handfuls, as a child gathers pebbles on the shore, while a tradesman of unbending honesty has struggled through a lifetime just to keep a doubtful equality between the winner and the spender. We have felt it in social life, when a reconciled adversary has stirred up all the warmth of kindly feeling, and gone straight into the inner chambers of a heart which has been locked to the fast and quiet friend of years. We have felt it in religious life, when a newly converted man has revelled in a joy and comfort which have never thrilled ourselves, though we have striven eagerly after the Divine image, and laboured in the Divine service delightedly and long. It is much the same feeling, with which a cynic with a turn for sarcasm might inveigh against that inverted philanthropy, which expends its charities on criminals, and leaves honest men to shudder before the

shadow of famine; or which immures helpless integrity in a prison which it calls a workhouse, and shelters lusty thievishness in a workhouse which it calls a prison; or which suffers honesty to embrown itself with the swarth of toil, and then starve, through an angry winter, in dismal attics and on scanty fare, while felons are so warmly housed, and carefully trained, and kindly fed, that they sigh when their release approaches, and steal *on purpose* to have a lodging in Dartmoor or Portland again. Yes! there are such anomalies both in man's and in God's government, which baffle all hasty thinkers, and which lead perplexed ones, in the track of the elder son, to feel wonder, and then despondency, and then murmuring, and then anger, and jealousy, and sullenness, and all the offspring of rebellion.

It was surely to soothe this natural perturbation, and to reassure the startled faith in goodness, shocked by this natural surprise, that the father "came out and entreated him." God bears with the infirmities of his people, and will not always chide, though there will be always cause for chiding. He does not break the bruised reed, nor fret it for its lack of strength; he does not quench the smoking flax, in anger that there is dark vapour where there ought to be brilliant flame. He props the reed and fans the flax until they become as a rod of strength, and as a beacon-blaze upon a hill. How marked and beautiful was this characteristic in the teaching of Jesus! Does the faith of the affrighted disciples fail them in a storm-swept vessel? He utters no rebuke of their cowardice until he has removed the source of their terror. Does

Peter, faltering from his momentary heroism, sink through the yielding wave; or, stricken with a very horror of cowardice, fringe his denial with a border of blasphemy? He is helped from the billows, and graciously forgiven for the sin. Do Zebedee's children become possessed of a strange ambition, and seek for a proud pre-eminence in his kingdom amid the clamour of the murmuring ten? He stills the rising indignation, and places the feet of humility upon the neck of pride. Is Thomas incredulous until the prints and scars convince him? In "reach hither thy finger," there is the best possible rebuke for unbelief.

And if you look into your own hearts, you will discover manifold and glorious instances of God's long-suffering. Can you not recall those seasons in your history when you staggered at the greatness of the promise, or shrank from the difficulty of the command; when, in the day of smiling fortune, you forgot the arm that raised you, and, in the day of frowning skies, you hardly and terribly rebelled? You have often since been so conscious of your sinfulness that you have wondered that the Lord bore with you, and your estimate of Divine loving-kindness rose so high that to you it is no marvel that, however strongly provoked to anger, he should come out and entreat the sinners against his grace and love.

The answer of the father to the petulant remonstrance of the son is very noticeable, and is very decisive. He might—human fathers would—have sternly rebuked all interference with his rightful authority; have stood upon his fatherly prerogative, and have frowned the complainer into silence by such an

utterance as, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good? is it not lawful for me to do as I will with mine own?" He might have readily exposed the lurking hypocrisy and alienation which the very terms of the remonstrance displayed. But he did neither of these. The justification of his conduct, which he condescends to make, rests not upon eternal sovereignty, but upon eternal fitness—not "I have willed to do this thing," but "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

This is but the repeated statement of that which it is the province of the whole chapter to enforce—that there is something in the moral recovery of a sinner over which God himself rejoices, and which is matter of legitimate gladness to every creature that his hands have made. The chapter says there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, "*more* than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Christ says there is a propriety in this, and we respond to it by the whole of our proceeding in the conduct of our natural affections, or in the regulation of our daily lives. We do not get into ecstasies every morning as we greet the friends from whom we parted overnight, and with whom we have exchanged the same customary salutations for years. Our deep love is not the less because the expressions of it are the less demonstrative. The gay peasants of beautiful Italy are so accustomed to bright sun and blue sky, that they are not prostrate in thankfulness, nor wild with delight, when they see the morning dawn; but in some arctic island, or at the close of some protracted rainy season

in the tropical savannah, the first glimpse of sunshine will be an inspiration of gladness, or a call to prayer. The stream flows leisurely in its wonted bed until the tempest howls or the obstruction comes, and then it overflows. Let the peril threaten our beloved ones, let the fangs of illness fasten, or the cold world's scorn assail, or adverse influences lour, and the deep tenderness will well forth upon them, with a full tide, unexpected even to ourselves—a very Nile of soothing and healing waters. If it had been the hap of the elder son to sicken, or to have been crushed beneath the bitterness of some terrible sorrow, all the spirit's joy-bells would have been rung for his recovery, and all the wealth's resources lavished with a free hand to restore to him the comfort of his soul. It was not that the father preferred the profligate to the faithful, or sanctioned disobedience and was indifferent to loyalty; in the one case, assuming that the elder's account of his own fidelity was true, there had been years of uninterrupted complacency and favour; in the other case, there was but an hour—a wild and rapturous hour of joy.

Not only is the justification rested upon the rightfulness of rejoicing over the recovery of the erring, but the elder son is reminded that his privilege is the greatest after all—"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." You can expand this sentiment that you may bring out all its fulness of meaning. "My son, why this unreasonable anger? of what hast thou to complain? hast thou not partaken of my bounty, shared my counsels, and been compassed with my love continually? I had thought

that thou lovedst me, and that my presence was dearer to thee than a kid slaughtered from the fold for a separate revel with 'thy friends.' Thou art ever with me. For thee there has been a constant feast, a never-ceasing smile of welcome. Why grudge to thy brother an hour of the gladness which thou hast realised for these many years? Thou complainest that thou hast never had a feast. No, nor the famine, nor the rags, nor the desertion of thy friends, nor the company of the swine. If thou hast never been wild with delight, thou hast never been frantic with agony; if thou hast never felt the ecstasy, thou hast never felt the hunger. Thy brother has smiled to-day in the light of his father's countenance—that light has shone upon thee, familiarly and without a cloud; thy brother has had shoes, a ring, a robe, a banquet—thou THE INHERITANCE, for 'all that I have is thine.'"

Brethren, surely our questionings have been answered, and our unbelief rebuked, while the father has thus been talking to the elder son. In the long run, depend upon it, there is a reward for the righteous, and the triumphing of the wicked is short. All our misgiving arises only from our short-sightedness, and we should bow in acquiescence and in gratitude if, like God, we could see the end from the beginning. The ancient Nemesis was fabled sometimes to tarry, in order that the man she tracked to ruin might be the more decisively destroyed; and God's providence, though in the noon of man's passion it may seem to slumber, is but accumulating the electricity which, in the dead of night, shall hurl its lightnings on his head. "Fret not thyself," therefore, "because of evil-doers,

neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Ps. xxxvii. 1–5). Do you wonder that that newly converted man, he who has been changed suddenly by Divine grace from profligacy to penitence, should have so much of the peace that passeth understanding, and of the joy of the Holy Ghost? Ah! cease your wonder—you have no need to envy him. He has been an orphan all his life; he may be allowed to exult a little in the new sensation of a father's clasping arms. He has hungered so long that his constitution has lost its tone, and he must have cordials and stimulants to supply his lack of vigour. He has been a serf and vassal, and he only leaps and shouts, perhaps, in this the first delirium of his freedom. You need not envy him. Ah! if you could but see how he envies *you*—you, the elder sons—who, during his long years of outlaw-life, have dwelt quietly and happily at home. He needs more joy than you do. If he has not an exuberance of Divine comfort, he will fail and be disheartened in the work which he has arisen to do. Long habits of ungodliness are tyrannous over him, from which your lives are free. There are memories of sin which haunt him like avenging spectres, and which people his fancy oftentimes with visions of such terrible impurity, that if they could but be burnt out of his

soul by sharpest cautery, he would shout welcome to the hissing brand. Rejoice over that prodigal, I charge you. Do not give him the cold glance and the short answer; watch over him with loving jealousy; help him speedily if his footsteps stumble. Prove your godliness by your God-*likeness*, in your tenderness of care over the erring, and in your frank and hearty joy for his recovery. "It is meet that you should make merry and be glad; for this *your brother* [can you say the word heartily? if you cannot, you are none of Christ's] was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

We fear, however, that with all our willingness to throw the mantle of charity over this elder son, we are compelled, by the evidence, to return him as the guiltier of the twain. It is not the perplexed saint who speaks in the bitter language of the narrative: taking the best view of it, *it is the ungenial and reluctant servant;* taking the worst view of it, *it is the unmasked hypocrite, or the ostentatious Pharisee.*

The type of character that is unfolded to us is of a very unamiable sort. He seems to have been a man reserved, and unsocial, with very little of the milk of human kindness—a man who could not have been intemperate if he would, at least without trampling upon all the barriers of his temperament—a miser rather than a spendthrift. The prodigal, at his wildest, was redeemed by a careless generosity, that might have shared his last shekel with a beggar; but the elder son would have been free from all suspicion of being guilty of any extravagance of charity. The prodigal turned out the whole of his nature—the worst

of him was patent to the sun; but the elder constrained himself to a decorous service, and hid, behind a plausible conduct, coarse passions and a sordid soul. At the best, there is nothing winning about him; he is but a son with a servant's heart. A son, with the heart of a son, might have been surprised when he heard the unwonted merriment; but his inquiry of the cause would have been made, not of the servant, but of the father, and the ice would have melted from his heart, even if annoyance had hastily frosted it, when his father came out and entreated him to fill the reserved seat, and share the general joy. Brethren, there are such ungenial professors of religion now—men "whose lot," in the quaint words of another, "is always cast in the land of Cabul." They are always "in the field" when the prodigal comes home; they are never ready to give the first shake of the hand to the wanderer; they fret at the bustle of his reception, partly because it disturbs their ease, and partly because it reveals their littleness. Their religion is a task-work, not a service of love—a burdened pilgrimage, not a sunny travel home. Meet them where you will, the atmosphere becomes suddenly polar; their trials are grievous, their discontents are many. To them there is no life in the Church, no summer in the world. Their principal activity is to suggest a deficiency or to expose a fault; for in proportion to their discomfort is their censoriousness, for, as it is a literary canon that the critical tendency lodges in the shallowest brain, even so the slanderous tendency coils about the weakest heart. If they are in the vineyard at all, they are stunted shrubs, or trees of

eccentric growth—they do not flourish in the beauty of the palm, nor endure in the vigour of the cedar. They know not of the delight of conversion, they rejoice not in God their Saviour. How utterly unhappy such a state of heart must be! The elder sons of this type are their own worst enemies ever. "He would not go in." Well, and who suffered but himself? The lights were not put out, the music did not cease, the festivity of the gathered household flowed evenly and merrily on. Even the father, though he came out to expostulate, and was grieved at the sullenness and sin, went in again to those who could appreciate his kindness, and whom his smile made happy. Father, servants, friends, prodigal, all were rejoicing together; he alone in the outer darkness nursed his selfish pride, and voluntarily excluded himself from the light and gladness of the home. Oh, if there are any here who thus banish themselves from the Church's common joy, I pray you think upon your folly! That Cabul is an unsightly place of sojourn, and there is no passage from it into heaven.

If, however, you narrowly look into the spirit of the elder son, it is to be feared that we can scarcely accord to him even the qualified praise of being a sincere but eccentric striver after the right. Closely examined, there are many points of identity between him and his brother, as his brother was when we first made his acquaintance, while there are features about the elder which make his impiety not only lamentable but repulsive. There was the same alienation of heart. It betrays itself in his very words. "Lo! these many years do I *serve* thee." A son would have said *love*

thee; but the spirit of the slave and of the hireling degraded the affection into a servitude undertaken for the hope of a reward. Hence he complains as a servant might whose wages had been unrighteously withheld, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." There was the same sinful longing for freedom from restraint and for indulgence in independent merriment. He, too, must have comrades that were unfitted for the presence of his father. With equal love of pleasure to his brother, but with a greater selfishness, he panted for the licence which yet his worldly prudence forbade him to request. How much better were his "friends" than the "harlots" of his erring brother? Did not the one answer to the other? In these, the essential points of the prodigal's rebellion, the elder was, on the testimony of his own lips—wrung from him in that unguarded moment when the mask slipped off from the countenance, because anger had convulsed it—as guilty as the brother he despised. Then he had other vices, which he could not forbear to display, and from which his more reckless brother was free. The faults of the prodigal were far removed from the dastardly and mean; but many of those vile passions, for which in the days of his flesh Christ reserved his severest reprobations, found a lodgment in the elder brother's soul. There is an implied isolation in the fact of his being left "in the field" until the ordinary hour of his return. The father knew his *selfishness*, and feared his ire, or the fleetest of foot would have been despatched to summon him to the festival of love. Then he displays the *anger* of offended pride, and *envy*,

too gross and foul a fiend to be harboured in a good man's bosom. Then the indignant remonstrance, which was the cruel answer to the father's entreaty, discovered not only his *servile spirit* and his *sordid hope of advantage*, but the complacent and haughty *self-righteousness* which, like Peter's Galilean speech, "bewrayeth" the Pharisee all the world over: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." How utterly does sin blind the conscience of its perpetrator! I have seen a drunkard stutter out an indignant protest against a charge of intemperance. I have known a swearer deny, with an oath, that he was ever guilty of a habit so profane; and here is a poor deluded sinner, in the very act of sin—sin against the love due to his brother and the honour due to his father together—laying to his soul the unction of a perfect righteousness, as if the summer fleece were impure in his presence, and the snow-flake stained beside him. What concentrated evil-heartedness, moreover, is there in the whole of his reference to the prodigal. "This thy son"—as though he had no affinity of blood, as though he would take care to shake free from the leprosy of such polluted relationship—"was come"—not was come *back;* that thought was a thought too high, his was too callous a nature to be thrilled with the great idea of *return*—"was come"—because necessity impelled him, and hunger drave him hither, an unfriended and miserable beggar—"which hath devoured thy living with harlots." How knew *he* that? Did his own base heart teach him? Was "the wish the father to the thought"? "*Thy* living"—every word is loaded with the utmost possible harsh-

ness, for, as his portion of goods, the living was in a sense his own. "But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Brethren, I ask you now, which is the guiltier—the generous, thoughtless, riotous prodigal, or the seemly, slanderous, hypocritical elder brother? And there are many such in our churches and congregations now. Do you ask who they are? All who hold the form, but who deny the power of godliness—all who "draw near to God with their mouth whilst their heart is far from him"—all who have never bowed the knee in broken-hearted sorrow, and are yet crying Peace, peace! to their imperilled and unhappy souls—all who repine at another's elevation, or are envious of another's good, while they deem their own virtues so unmistakeable, and their own excellence so manifest, as to silence all gainsayers—they are the elder brothers. Perhaps—let us come closer—there is very much of his image in ourselves. It is said that when a company of German divines were discussing this parable, and various conjectures were hazarded as to the identity of this elder son, a devout but eccentric brother, on being applied to for his opinion, said—"I know, for I learned it yesterday. *It is myself!* for I fretted and murmured because such an one had an extraordinary baptism of the Holy Spirit from on high." Oh for the spirit of searching, to discover and to exorcise the demon!

But there is mercy even for the elder son. The Father entreats still; and the censoriousness and hypocrisy, as well as the impatience and estrangement, may be freely and graciously forgiven. The grand

jubilate with which the chapter closes forbids us to despair of any. It is meet that God should save them, and that the whole ransomed universe should exult over the pardoned sinner. Mercy! joy because of mercy! These are the latest notes of the spirit-psalm which linger on our ears and in our hearts as this sweet chapter closes. Mercy! God's best and dearest attribute! Mercy! earth's last and fondest hope! Mercy! Heaven's crowning and eternal triumph! It is stammered out from mortal lips that fain would lisp its music—it swells in grandest diapason in the song of the redeemed. Last and longest of the impressions which this subject may have made upon our minds, this thought of mercy clings. And now that we are closing this series of life-pictures, drawn with a trembling hand, and with a deep consciousness of latent beauty and power in the subject which are beyond the artist's skill, one vision seems to fill the foreground: it is that of the Father clasping the prodigal to his embrace in the sight of earth and heaven, and saying, in tones to which the choirs of angels were discord, and which each seraph hushes his song that he may hear, "I am he that speaketh in righteousness," and that am

"MIGHTY TO SAVE."

XIII.

SIN AND MERCY.

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."—Isa. xliv. 22.

HOW wonderful is the influence of the love of Christ! It impregnates the world with fragrance. It transforms the vile into the precious, and exalts the common into the consecrated. It lights up this stricken and wailing planet with a strange gladness, and makes earth the vestibule and audience-room of heaven.

There are some representations of the Divine character which are calculated only to inspire us with awe. We cannot contemplate his incommunicable perfections without inexpressible reverence. When we, who are creatures of clay, hear of his power—that "he doeth as he will among the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"—when we are told of his omnipresent and all-searching eye, that "if we ascend into heaven he is there; that if we make our bed in hell, behold! he is there; that if we take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall his hand lead

us, and his right hand shall hold us"—when the challenge is given, "Who is a God like unto thee?"—and when Nature renders her conclusive and imposing witness to the grandeur of his perfections—we shrink into our native insignificance, and are humbled in the dust under his mighty hand. And yet we are allowed to refer to other perfections more consoling and delightful; and if our minds prostrate themselves before "the great and only Potentate," we may lift ourselves to behold him in the tenderer majesty of his goodness, scattering around him the tokens and memorials of his love. Such contemplations are suggested by the passage which is now before us.

If I speak to any who still slumber "in the oldness of the letter," there is that in the words which I trust may rouse them to thought and to prayer; if I speak to any of aroused conviction and alarmed conscience, there is that in the words which is suited to their need, and which can fill them with confidence and joy.

I. *There is recognised the existence of sin.*
II. *There is affirmed the exercise of mercy.*

I. The individuals to whom this gracious promise was addressed had been guilty of enormous and aggravated rebellion; their transgressions had gathered blackness and density—they were as "a thick cloud," and "as a cloud." The prophet in the commencement of his prophecy paints their turpitude in graphic and awful colours. They are brought into degrading comparison with the very beasts of the field: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

He proceeds to represent their crimes as a burden, weighing them down from the erectness of manhood, so that they are obliged to stoop and crouch beneath the inexorable tyranny of evil—"a people *laden* with iniquity." This depravity has come down in hereditary transmission from generation to generation—"a seed of evil-doers." There has been a sad inversion of all natural order: the very guileless age of childhood, which should be shocked at sounds of ribaldry, and scared at sights of sin, has become at once an adept and a teacher in evil—"children that are corrupters." They have arrived at that dogged and audacious pertinacity in crime when even chastisement loses its salutariness, and fails of its wonted effect. "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint."

He represents them moreover as, with all this badness of heart and looseness of life, decorous and seemly in external worship—their fasts rigidly observed, their service faultless, their praises harmoniously intoned—and thus giving a deeper dye and fouler loathsomeness to their impiety by a hypocritical profession of religion. "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." How terrible a description of a people estranged from God! But, passing from these particular individuals to the general aspect of the race, the awful description will in substance apply to every son and daughter of Adam.

The challenge is a universal one: "Who can say, I

have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" One answer alone must be universally returned: "The good man is perished out of the earth." "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." "Every mouth is stopped, and all the world is guilty before God." The spreading virus has infected every vein, the fretting pestilence has slaughtered and sepulchred a world. Yes, sin is everywhere. The crown has dropped from the brow of human nature; the sceptre, wielded in Eden, has been cast from the nerveless and paralyzed arm; and the olden Paradise itself, as if the very scene of the great rebellion could no longer be borne, has been swept from the face of the earth. Man, indeed, delirious in his ruin, a dreamer of happiness amid the squalor and beggary of the fall, may in the visions of the night picture the primitive Elysium, fragrant and beautiful, with the footsteps of angels treading its soft solitudes, and the voice of God in delicious companionship, heard "in the cool of the day." But morning comes with its cold awakening light, dashes him from his momentary elevation, despoils him of his sorcery and of his throne, and rouses him to the sorrowful consciousness that

> "If, round Eden's distant steep,
> Angelic legions stray,
> Alas! they are but sent to keep
> His guilty foot away."

Yes, sin is everywhere. Broad and deep, the wide world over, we can trace the fire-written syllables: "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

We know that the doctrine we preach is to pseudo-philanthropists and benevolent idealists unpopular and repulsive—"a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence"—but we cannot help that. This fancied exemption from the ruin of the fall, this clinging to the perfectibility of unaided human nature, is a dangerous error which has already slain its thousands, and which must, at all hazards, be confronted and exposed.

It is this self-exalting theory which lies at the root of many fatal schemes of error—which has infected our current literature, which has warped the reasonings of our press, which is prominent in the harangues of our popular lectures — many of them mischievously clever—and which by the flattery of its siren-song, has lured many an unwary sinner to his own shame.

There are many now-a-days whose sole business seems to be to exalt the nature they inherit, to dwell upon its power of self-guidance, and to trace its brilliant march from the low to the lofty—from the transcendental up to the divine. They talk of its dignity as if it were stainless and noble. They forget that sin has marred its beauty, and tarnished its honour, and that its only dignity now is the dignity of the traitor, saved by the clemency of the monarch from the penalties of the headsman or the gallows.

You may try the experiment in its fairest aspects for yourselves. You may take a child in its innocence and sensibility, and deeming, with Lord Palmerston, that all children are born good, you may assiduously instruct it in the principles of morals, and carefully seclude it from the influence of bad example. You

may write upon its fresh young heart the laws of rectitude and the benevolent affections, and the holy name of God; and you may watch for the development of all that is "of good report, and lovely."

Ah, you have been too late in the field: you deemed your inscription was the first, but "an enemy hath done this" before you. The heart is over-written already. Let but the passions play upon the opening mind, let the fire of temptation near it, hold it up to the lamp of opportunity, and in hell's dark cipher there will become distinct and palpable the characters of crime.

There are times, indeed, when the foulness of human nature will precipitate, and when it may present an aspect of moral amiableness and beauty. You can hardly fancy, in the summer-time, that the lake which sparkles in the sunbeam, and whose blue depths are clear and calm, could ever be lashed into a thing of storm; but let the blasts of winter rage, and they swell the turbid waters, and the scowling waves will foam out their own shame.

The Gospel proceeds altogether upon the basis of an entire and universal depravity. "It assimilates all varieties of human character into one common condition of guilt, and need, and helplessness." And this is just that part of it, against which the man of honest worldliness or the man of graceful generosity feels most disposed to fret and to rebel. They do not like to be grouped up with publicans and harlots and the outcasts from the society of men. They cannot brook it, that they should require precisely the same kind of treatment to prepare them for

a joyous immortality, as the most profligate and abandoned of their neighbours. And yet the Scripture leaves them no alternative.

It recognises but two varieties of character here, and but two varieties of condition in the world beyond the grave. And it were easy to trace out characters, from the extreme of murderous atrocity to the highest blamelessness of merely human morality, and to show that they are alike "ungodly;" and "the ungodly cannot stand in the judgment," any more than "sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

We shall carry along with us universal conviction and universal sympathy, when we affirm the depravity of the wretch who with fiendish resolve has plotted, and with ruthless hand has perpetrated, a murder. We shall not have many deniers of our position, if we detach one feature of offensiveness from that abominable character. Leave him with all his dishonesty, and with all his licentiousness, but let him recoil, with natural aversion, from the shedding of blood.

But if you admit thus far the soundness of our argument, you must go with us when we apply it to the man of ease and affluence, constitutionally abhorrent of cruelty and perfidy, whose type is the man of whom we read in the parable—charged neither with fraud in acquiring, nor with insolence in spending wealth, but simply that in his life of luxury "he was not rich toward God." Committed as you are to the principle, you must carry it still higher. The man may be furnished at once with fine sensibility and with honourable principle. Integrity the noblest may stamp his dealings, he may have been tested by the

temptations of unlawful gain and by the reverses of sad and perplexing embarrassment, and amid all fluctuations may have retained the goodwill of his fellows and an untarnished character; and this righteous man, so high in his practice of commercial virtues, may have won by his benevolence and amiableness a rich revenue of affection, and his family may cling with fondness round his knees, and deem him the "good man for whom peradventure some would dare to die." It is difficult to look on such a man and restrain your involuntary homage; and yet, "though we love the man, we will not lie about the man." It may be—it very often is—that the Being who brought him into existence, who fitted his heart for its emotions of uprightness and generosity, who made the world a theatre for their exercise, who gave his admirers hearts to appreciate and tongues to express their appreciation of his moral worth, "is not in all his thoughts." No motive of love to God, or even fear of his displeasure, has actuated his conduct; and if he dies in his present region, and with his present trust, without the transformation and without the hope of the Gospel, like a beauteous wreck drifting down upon the dark waters to ruin, he will have to depart from the presence of God, banished everlastingly from the glory of his power.

This is the scriptural estimate of the morality that is without godliness. Upon the most exalted professors of this mere earthly goodness, Christ comes with the keenness of his discernment, and with the power of his rebuke: "I know you, that ye have not the love of God within you;" and because of this fact, and of

this fact alone, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world be guilty before God."

Brethren, I do account it a satisfaction, amid the manifold unworthinesses of my ministerial life, that on this matter I have given no uncertain sound. I do insist upon it as indispensable to a faithful minister of Christ, that he should with all fidelity set forth the guilt and danger of every member of his charge; that he should allow no peace while there is no godliness; that he should proclaim war to the grave while sin lords it in undisputed ascendency; that he should mix restlessness for the sinner—sorrow in his cup—anxiety gnawing at his vitals—care corroding his enjoyments—remorse lashing him through the earth like a doomed and stricken spirit—so long as he willingly submits to be "led captive by the Devil at his will."

And this is just the conviction to which I wish to bring you now—not that they are sinners, who dwell amid the darkness of heathenism; not that they are sinners, who crowd the hulks for punishment, or breathe in prisons the feculent air; not that they are sinners, who follow unblushing in the drunkard's revel, or in the harlot's train;—but that *you* are sinners—sinners in danger of perishing; that many of you, with abundant light, with all possible moral appliances, with counselling friends, with pious education, with a faithful ministry, with many—very many—impressions of religion, are in danger of perishing; more heinous in guilt and more fearful in punishment than Sodom; that between you and heaven at this moment there is a chasm which none but the Almighty can bridge

over; that in your heart there is a taint of radical vileness, which only the heart's blood of the Saviour can hallow; that upon you rests an amount of wrath and of wretchedness, which only a heaven-descended atonement can effectually bear away.

II. There is affirmed the existence of *mercy*.

It might have been imagined, that the declaration of apostasy and impenitence would have been followed by the threats of doom. We might have supposed that when the prophet had revealed transgressions "like a thick cloud," he might have gone away without holding out any hope of mercy.

Is not Jehovah a just God? Is he not angry with the wicked every day? Are not his perfections united in their opposition to sin? Do not sins of aggravation and enormity expose their perpetrators to a fearful doom? And yet we hear not the voice of vengeance, but the voice of mercy.

The Lord is not in the whirlwind. We see him not in the fire; we hear him not in the storm; but the still small voice calmly whispers, and he is there. And he speaks to the criminal arraigned at the bar, and confused with the conviction of his crimes: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Premising that this promise of mercy is reconciled with God's purity, and with his recorded displeasure against sin by the atonement of Jesus, so that no dishonour is done to the Throne, and the law is upheld, vindicated, magnified, we observe that this character of God, as a God of mercy, is the great

Bible theme. The whole tale of the Scriptures is a story of grace. Every promise distils it. It is the burden of the prophet's message and of the poet's song. Evangelists live but to point to its fulness. Apostles preach but to unfold its wonders. The last words of the volume, before it was finally closed as a completed and authoritative revelation, are words of grace, as if the Angel of Mercy lingered to utter them, and uttered them last that they might leave the most indelible impression, as if it were wished to attest the validity of every other invitation by that last stamp of the signet-ring—"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

We said that sin was everywhere. Blessed be God! "where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded." Like the rich music of some majestic river, it ceases not day nor night in its benevolent flow—generation after generation rippling on—ever sounding its notes of gladness in the ears of the guilty and the dying. The gracious mind of God unrolls itself fold after fold, in the successive pages of the Bible. The gracious purposes of his heart, like so many stars—countless and unquenchable—come sparkling out through the midnight of our destiny. Turn where we will, gaze where we will, there is the grace of God shining out in its unsullied brightness, or struggling through the clouds which obscure or discolour its light.

Scarcely had the fall defiled the world, and entailed its heritage of wrath and shame, before the first pro-

mise of grace was breathed: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Scarcely had the thunders of Sinai died away, before Grace spoke in comfort: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord, merciful and gracious, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin." This is the free, the certain, the repeated testimony of the word, that "if through the offence of one, many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, ha abounded unto many."

This gift of grace was never known until the entrance of sin. There had been power, and righteousness, and goodness before. There was power in the creation of all that is—in the glorious furniture of the heavens—in the fiat by which the wondrous earth came forth; there was righteousness in the allotments of the heavenly hierarchy—in the hurling of the rebellious over the battlements of heaven; there was goodness, pure essential goodness, in the love that was manifested towards Adam unfallen.

But when man sinned, perverted his nature, corrupted his way, bereft himself of every love-compelling quality—became utterly defiled and unworthy—then grace came in a new fountain struck out of the Godhead, a new idea for the wonder and homage of the universe. All former displays which God had made of himself were ascents to higher elevation. This was a mightier forthputting of his perfections, inasmuch as it showed—not only how high the love of God could rise, but how deeply the mercy of God could go down—not only the glorious fellowship of

angels which it could fill with its rejoicing, but the branded and downtrodden outcasts to whom it could stoop and uplift them from hell into heaven. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and mercy of God."

We announce it then, brethren, as an indubitable and glorious fact, that God can "be just, and the justifier of all them that believe." Christ hath died, the just for the unjust. The everlasting Son of the everlasting Father has stooped from his throne; he became the weeping babe in the manger of Bethlehem —the weary traveller on the journey of life—the agonized sufferer in the garden of Gethsemane—the spotless victim on the hill of shame.

The declarations of the vicarious nature of the death of Christ are frequent and impressive: "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins." "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Brethren, it is on the cross of Christ that the law is magnified and the pardon sealed, that holiness glows in imperishable vindication, and that mercy triumphs in her proudest gains. The cross is the fulness of love, the security of hope, the pledge of immortality; and the application of the blood of the cross—not its

exhibition, not the intellectual assent to it as a doctrine, not even the deeply-wrought conviction of its necessity—but the application—the real, vital, appropriating application of that blood to the conscience—secures forgiveness, happiness, heaven.

Brethren, I do rejoice that the statement of salvation is so clear, and that it is before you now. I address you all. No need of cruel lacerations, difficult penances, costly works, piled-up charities; broad and strong upon your hearts I impress the old Gospel message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

XIV.

STRENGTH AND PEACE.

"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."—Ps. xxix. 11.

THOROUGHLY to realize all the comfort of this delightful promise, you must acquire some knowledge of the geographical structure of the psalm. Standing in the porch of the Temple, the Psalmist watches the progress of a thunder-storm as it rises in the distance, swells grandly on, breaks over his head, and passes away. He imagines its first rise from the far Mediterranean, and its royal play upon the waters: "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty" (vers. 3, 4). He then traces it as it has settled upon the lofty range of the Lebanon hills, and the tall cedars are uprooted and broken by the roughness of its mountain sport: "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn" (vers. 5, 6). Forked and vivid, the blue lightnings glare, and the storm howls through the wilderness, making its desolation more savage and desolate still:

"The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh" (vers. 7, 8). On it sweeps from the cleft uplands, pouring its destructive floods through woodland knolls and o'er the level and indented plain; for the brand has unlocked the prisoned heart of waters, and they leap to be released as the prisoner leaps from bondage: "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (ver. 9, 10). And now the tempest has fulfilled its purifying mission; and as the big drops linger upon the panting flower-cup, or go to swell the murmur of the brook into a hoarser chorus, there is a glad hush upon the landscape, and a sweet balm upon the heaven-scented air. Then the minstrel speaks to the heart of faith, and out of the recent freshly-remembered danger he reads the lesson, everlasting in its comfort, of a safety which no disasters can disturb: "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

And it is so often with us—is it not? that the things we soonest dread are those in which our protection and our blessing lie? Who of us is there that would not have been more cowardly than the disciples in their fear, when, still and pale along the heavy night and cheerless waters, there moved that awful form? The thunder frightens us; we heed not that it stays the pestilence. We shudder when the keen lightnings play, forgetful that they cleave the

clouds which hang darkly on our pathway home. It is doubly sweet, therefore, when we are assured that the world's dreadful things are but the tokens of his power, who is our Saviour, and that when the tempest rages and the aliens fear, we have a filial interest in the great Being who rides on the whirlwind, and directs the storm. But the promise is to "his people" both of strength and peace. They only who have chosen his service, and who abide with all faithfulness in his testimonies, are the heirs of these inspiring words. For all others there is no relief from the crash of the storm, nor comfort in the peal of the thunder. It behoves us to inquire into the reality of our interest in the promise, and to assure ourselves of that, that so our souls may exult in the breadth and fitness of the blessing which these words contain—"strength and peace." And what else can our utmost need comprise? See the labourer whom the morning calls from slumber, hastening to the cheerful fields where the dew has freshly glittered, and the lark has newly sung—what needs he for the work which waits his ready hand? Surely strength to do it—the flexile muscle, the strong obedient sinew. See him again at the eventide, when the sun is liberal to the western clouds, and throws them largess of glory. See how, to greet his homeward footstep, little feet are pattering from under the jasmined thatch, and at the garden gate. There is great mystery and clapping of hands, while from the inner room there flashes out upon the twilight a loving wifely smile. What is his fitting blessing just then? what the endowment which seems properly to belong to that season? Surely

peace—nothing to corrode, distract, alarm—a tranquil spirit, around which slumber draws, as the cool quiet shadows draw around the outside world. It would seem then, that in the two blessings promised in the text we have the supply of our need, alike for our morning work and evening rest, the inspiration for the duty and the recompense of its loyal discharge—"strength and peace." They must be united to fulfil the highest uses of each other. There must be no remorse in the bosom of the strong man, no consuming passion-fever, no deep wasting anxiety, or his strength will be paralyzed and his labour be left unfinished. There must be no feebleness even in the tired frame, or sleep will flee the eyelids, and the man will toss in nightly unrest that will unfit sadly for the energies of daily toil. The complement of Christian endowment, therefore, is to be realized in the fulfilment of the promise of the text; and ye whose hearts are fixed, though your fortunes are tried, may for your encouragement dwell upon it to-day.

I. "The Lord will give strength unto his people." This surely implies *that he will enable them to come to him at first*, that the sincere desire, the Godward turning of the soul, the almost hopeless glance of penitence toward the far-off heaven, shall receive encouragement, and help, and promise. The first power, indeed, to awake out of the death of sin, must be of Divine bestowment. The state of the race is uniformly represented in Scripture to be a state of absolute helplessness. The strength is utterly shred out of us; we are incapable by our unaided strength of one solitary

godly impulse—we are "*dead* in trespasses and sins." But the Breath has come forth to breathe upon the valley of the slain; the influences of the quickening and free Spirit have been purchased for the race by the offering of the universal Surety, and the true Light, coming into the world, enlighteneth every man that dwells upon its surface, or that breathes its air. The universality of the heritage of the Spirit is as complete as is the universality of the defilement of the fall. The blessing comprises and would hallow wherever the curse has tainted and banned.

Oh, it is a beautiful thought—redeeming our conceptions of human destiny from the despondency which the meditation upon sin's ravages induces—that God the Comforter is in the world, and that he strives with men, with all men, to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. There is not one who is bereft of this precious influence from Heaven. Do you startle at an announcement so broad? Do your thoughts wander to some unhappy one whose downward course you have traced, whose countenance is coarsely lined with evil wrinkles, not sown there by the hand of Time—to whom, in his insolent impiety, there is neither endearment in affection nor sacredness in law, and whose life seems to be one long outrage upon the charities which are society's enduring bond; and are you sceptical as to any softening upon that hardness of heart, as to any Divine influence at work upon that vessel of wrath long since fitted for destruction? His secret heart, if you could but always see it, would reveal many a convincing memory, and many a whispered warning; you would find that there have been times in

his history when he has bowed, sincere and reverent as childhood; when he has stayed, spell-bound, from some contemplated crime, because there has thrilled through him some remembered stanza of his infancy; or when his companions of the revel have jeered him for his unusual thoughtfulness because he heard a voice they could not hear—borne in to him by some subtle mental association, and repeating some godly rebuke of a father, long departed, or some wishful earnestness of a minister who speaks on earth no longer. I am bold to affirm it, there is not one before me, grown to man's estate, arrived at those years of life when the mysterious purchase of the fall—the knowledge of good and evil—has come upon you, who has not been personally the subject of the strivings of the good Spirit of God. You may have perversely hardened yourselves in sin, or you may have encrusted yourselves with worldly policy and interests as with a triple-coated weapon of resistance, or, stolid and shameless, you may have been sunken in indifference to all things true and sacred; but your wanderings have not been without a reprover, nor your slumbers without a rebuking vision. God has not left himself without a witness even in you. There have been seasons of visitation when you were unwontedly subdued, when impressions were within you, which, yielded to, would have led you to Christ. There have been obstructions in your evil ways, placed there by a Divine hand; and if you perish after all, it will be the suicide's perdition, it will be because you sought and loved Death—because, with a strong will to die, you plunged over the gulf, heedless of the grace that clasped you, and of the

forbearing loving-kindness which did not cease its longings for your return. Oh yes! no feeble spirit, convinced and disquieted, need plead its feebleness as a ground of refusal to come to the Saviour. Let but the paralyzed shamble, or be carried, to Bethesda, and the angel surely will trouble the waters. Let the prodigal sadden on his homeward journey, and while yet a great way off, he will be met and overwhelmed by the prescient tenderness of the Father. I speak to-day to those who know this of a truth. You remember when you first essayed to come—when, with the scales just falling from your eyes, you asked, trembling and astonished, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" How eager was the gentleness which greeted your coming, and how exquisite the care which guided your blundering footsteps, until you had got where the "green pastures" flourished and the "still waters" rippled by! And so eagerly will all feeble ones be strengthened and all penitents welcomed to the Saviour's heart and arms. Sinner! he awaiteth thee. He, touched with the feeling of thine infirmities—he, with all the lovingness of thy kindliest fellow, and with all the omnipotence of God—he awaiteth thee. Do thy knees totter? Are thy hands infirm? have they lost the clasping power? He shall confirm the weak hand and strengthen the feeble knee. Dost thou sink beneath the yielding waters? See, he walks upon them to thy rescue. Art thou frightened by the storm's nearing howl, sobbing out thy sorrow like an ailing child? His arms are round thee, and thou art safe. Dost thou endeavour to pray, but words fail thee—thy tongue cleaves to thy mouth—the labouring

silence broken only by the groans of the chafed spirit, which frets beneath the burden of too strong a sorrow? He reads thy heart, and says to thee, ere yet thy efforts have prevailed to syllable a prayer, "Before ye call I will answer; and while ye are yet speaking I will hear." "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

There is implied also in this promise, *the communication of the gift of power to be a true witness and good soldier of the Truth.* It is manifest that those who are called to the service of the Truth must not be passive recipients of its influence, nor indol[illegible] pensioners upon its abundance of privilege. [illegible]th is not a fortune bequeathed, but a stewardship entrusted, and requiring exactness and fidelity in the discharge of the duties which it involves. The whole of the representations, under which the Christian life is presented in Scripture, are suggestive of *activity.* Every promise addressed to the apocalyptic churches is "to him that overcometh;" and "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." You will be confirmed in your estimate of this, if you call to mind what a Christian is summoned to do. There have been passions within him, aforetime turbulent and unruly; they are to be tamed into completest order, and are to be sentinels in the new palace in which the heavenly monarch is to dwell. There has been a will, haughty and defiant, which refused formerly to submit to the Master's yoke, and vaunted of its freedom by an insolent championship of evil. That will, preserving its empire and its liberty, is to choose to be a servant of Christ, and reverently to yield itself

to his better and perfect will. There has been an imagination, truant from the truth, prone to fill the chambers of her imagery with vain pictures of forbidden delights, and to keep the censers of her ministry fed with strange fire. This imagination is to be subdued from its waywardness, and to become a chastened waitress upon faith and love. There has been a conscience, recreant often from its trust, paltering with duty in a double sense, true perhaps in its own judgments, but rare and feeble in its magisterial warnings. This conscience is to become a true viceroy, indicating the counsel and jealous for the honour of the Sovereign. There has been a life, indifferent—it may be rebel—at best unharmful to others, and light-hearted in its enjoyment of its own heritage of hours. That life is to be regarded henceforth as a consecrated thing; its time is to be hoarded for God, as a miser hoards his treasure; its energy is to find a home in benevolent and holy effort, and its eye to sparkle with the radiance of an inner and heavenlier glory. This is, in briefest summary, what a Christian is called upon to do; and you will readily perceive that all this involves no little strife and conflict, and that to bear himself bravely in this conflict, with combined foes outside and a traitorous heart within, he must needs have invulnerable armour, and be sustained and heartened by a strength that is mightier than his own. How otherwise could he—very weakness as he is—accomplish a work so mighty? The world is powerful, and is marshalled against him; where is his might to cope with its banded legions, or hold his own against its hate or scorn? The flesh within him "lusteth to evil;" how shall he

understand its secrets, defeat its devices of impurity, and carry on triumphant warfare, even in the stronghold of the soul? The enemy, the Devil, with a malignity embittered, and a cunning perfected by the lapse of many miserable years, waiteth to entangle and devour. How shall he withstand a craft so exquisite, and be unscathed amidst a hate so deadly? The heart of many a Christian warrior has been often thus painfully questioned, and in itself, and in all the resources of merely human alliance, it could furnish no comforting reply. But here comes in the blessedness of the inimitable promise: "The Lord will give strength unto his people"—strength for their very fiercest combat, strength mightier than of their subtlest and most fiendish enemy. Every need of the chafed wrestler, of the wearied pilgrim, of the bleeding but still dauntless soldier, is comprised in these inspiring words. I remind you of their comfort now. There are those before me by whom the consolation is needed. With high purpose of right, you have enlisted under the cross-banner of the spiritual knighthood, and you are anxious to be manful in the strife and to bear witness faithfully and with honour. But you are often disheartened. The purity, after which you are bound to aim, glitters far above you, seeming distant and inaccessible as the summit of an Alp; the enemies appear so formidable, and your own heart so treacherous and unstable, that the lethargy of the soul will creep over you, like that fatal drowsiness which overtakes a frosted traveller, and you are almost ready, for very weariness, to lie down and die. My brother, take this promise, and let it be the staff in your hand in your

difficult and perilous climbing: "The Lord will give strength unto his people"—needed, suitable, abundant, everlasting strength. With this promise relied on in the heart, and realized as it will soon be in the experience, the stammering lip will become eloquent in testimony, and the coward soul will glow with a hero's bravery; that Divine strength, never exhausted, breathed into the soul for every day's exigency, and ceasing not, however long the combat or protracted the pilgrimage, will strengthen you to persevere. In that strength you shall gird yourselves, unfearing, for the struggle with the latest enemy; then, like the Master you have served, you shall conquer by dying. That strength shall nerve you for the final shout of triumph, and, having "finished the work" and "kept the faith," you shall pass in among the greeting angels to the harp, and the palm, and the crown.

II. There is another blessing which this wealthy word announces, and to which believers have an equal claim: "The Lord will bless his people with peace." You cannot look into the Bible, either into the Old Testament or into the New, without discovering that peace is, so to speak, the master-blessing, the grand issue both of the Law and of the Gospel to mankind. Thus it is the climax of the Jewish benediction, as if in those rich old times of Levitical costliness and beauty there was no higher blessedness than that "The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." It is presented, moreover, in glowing

prophecy as the crowning result of the Messiah's reign: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." Floating through the ages as the understood purpose of incarnate Deity, it reappears in the song with which Heaven announced his advent to enraptured Earth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." It was the Saviour's chosen salutation: "Peace be unto you"—the salutation with which his heralds were to inaugurate their entrance into a dwelling: "Peace be on this house." The dying Saviour bequeathed it to his followers as his most precious legacy of love: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." And the apostle, in a prayer whose every emphatic word shows his estimate of its inestimable worth, supplicates the "God of peace to give peace always and by all means." If such be the Scripture importance of this blessing, there is surely strong consolation for us, who by Divine grace may claim it for our own.

The first and highest thing which seems to be implied in this blessing of peace is *conscious reconciliation with God*. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Here is the scriptural assertion of the believer's privilege—"peace with God," freedom from the sense of wrath, and from the apprehension of doom, and this freedom to be enjoyed already—not merely to light up the death-bed, not merely to play around the destiny with a sort of tremulous lustre, but to brighten with its radiance the sky of the present, as well as to redeem the future from its otherwise hopeless gloom. "We

have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." You are familiar—alas! who is not?—with the sad history of the original fall, and with its transmission both of guilt and depravity to the whole hapless race who have sprung from the first pair. You are no strangers, either, to that all-comprising provision by which God's justice, satisfied of its claims, and God's mercy, exulting in the grandeur of its compassions, combine for the salvation of the penitent and believing sinner. Faith in Christ is the divinely appointed condition on which this salvation hangs; and so soon as a sinner believes, however leprous up to the moment of his faith, however recklessly he may have laboured previously to discrown himself of the glory of his manhood, he enters upon the inheritance of the covenant, and is fully and consciously forgiven. God, the Sovereign, pardons; God, the Judge, justifies; God, the Father, adopts into his family, all through the merits of Jesus; and the Divine Spirit, a swift messenger to testify to the fact of adoption, works in that same instant the regeneration of the nature, by which the stony is removed and the heart of flesh brought in, and by which the new life issues from the new heart, to flow, broadening and deepening, up into its source and centre—God. And this peace in believing is no heirloom of a family, nor immunity of a favoured few. It is the common privilege of faith. If you do not enjoy it, you are living below the blessings which the gospel has provided for you; you are choosing the position of a servant, when God calls you to the endearment of a son. Oh, do not rob yourselves of the comfort of which you are chartered as the rightful heirs. Dwell

no longer in the dreamy cloudland, through whose rifts the sun shines seldom, and where the air is thin and cold. Come into the bright land, where the light of God's countenance shineth and warmeth ever. There is no condemnation in that land, for the curse doth not brood there; there is no doubt nor fear, for the shadows have vanished and the true Light is gleaming still. The dwellers there run with cheerful feet in the way of duty, for there is no suspicion to clog the movements, nor despair to leaden the soul; the redeemed walk there with songs and everlasting joy; God visits that land as a more perfect Eden, and it adjoineth heaven. The invitation is in good faith offered to you all—on the simple terms of penitence and trust in Christ. Instead of the curse, you may have the blessing; instead of insecurity, the sure refuge of the everlasting arms; instead of dark omens in the conscience and hard thoughts of God, the love of God shed abroad, and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeping your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

In the peace which the text promises, there is implied also *the hush and harmony of the once discordant spirit.* It has been said that "order is heaven's first law," and it is certain that the order of creation is its glory—that the continuance of each sphere in its orbit, and of each wonderful succession in its allotted sequence, makes up the harmony of the magnificent whole. Now the great law of order was maintained in the creation of man. There were no native elements of disturbance in his soul. His body—adapted and exquisite in its design—yielded all its members to

fulfil the behests of the soul; and that soul knew no tumult of corruption, but its every faculty was loyal, and its every thought reverent and sincere. Sadly was this original quiet convulsed by the fact of the fall. The conscience, intended to be the monarch of the faculties, was deposed from its sovereignty; the will, forgetful of its plighted troth, ran greedily after evil for reward; and the passions, in their frantic sport, scattered firebrands and arrows and death. And this discord of the nature exists still; and where it has not been counteracted by the humanizing Gospel of Christ, it has made each land a Bochim, and each heart a hell. Whence come wars and fightings, perfidies and cruelties, the satrap's insult and the oppressor's wrong? Are they not all fruits of the one upas tree? It is the great original discord of the nature, which is perpetuated in each passionate outburst and in each wrangling lawsuit, in each outcast ruffian and in each unhappy home. And if you travel into any unconverted heart, you find it brooding there. Disunion of purposes—a law in the members warring against the law of the mind—passion triumphing even against the dictates of the judgment, and the decisions, strongly pronounced, both of reason and conscience together—the harbouring of thoughts revengeful, or malicious, or sinister, or haughty, or impure. Brethren, have you not felt them in yourselves? do you not mourn, those of you who have the mastery, that there are so many of them remaining—subdued, but not destroyed? It is for you to comfort yourselves with the promise: "The Lord will bless his people with peace." Keep your faith firm and strong in the promises, and the anarchy

within shall disappear. There shall be the casting down of the imaginations of your pride. Passions shall be no longer tempters to evil, but agents and energies for good; and all the rebel within you, constrained to sweet submission, bound in willing captivity, shall be at one in the service of Christ. Yes, it shall be so. The ocean swells stormfully now, the vexed waves toss and murmur in their wrathfulness, but he shall speak and there shall be a great calm. "Strength and peace!" And surely in their grandest combination, they shall unite within the soul at last. The strength and peace of thy lifetime, O thou follower of Jesus, shall gird and bless thee more when thou comest to the mortal struggle. Hast thou feared that last fight? Doth cheek blanch and lip quiver at the thought of it? Why fearest thou? That enemy has been overcome. He is no giant invincible, that all the armies of Israel should flee before him. He, who is thy Peace and thy heart's Strength, abolished him for thee eighteen centuries ago. Death to the Christian is but the time of greatest triumph, because the time of nearest home. Just as autumnal tints are richest on the woodland, and the decaying forest-trees wear gayest colours, as if, like so many Cæsars, they had gathered their imperial robes about them—so seemly to die—so the Christian has found often the strength most vigorous and the peace the stillest and divinest, when the shadow gathered on the countenance, sympathetic with the other shadow which had waited in the room. Be comforted, my brother, whom the thought of death hath oftentimes oppressed with a strange, heavy disquiet. Be comforted. *God will be glorified in the*

death, if thou but aim to glorify him in the life. If the eventide come on with lengthening shadows, or without a twilight, as in Eastern skies, there shall be light at eventide. If the conflict be with torn plume and broken sword, like the wounded chieftain,

> "With dying hand above the head,
> You'll shake the fragment of the blade,
> And shout your victory."

And when the last convulsion thrills the quiet frame no more, and weeping friends sigh in the first burst of sorrow—"so good, so kind, and he is gone"—in heaven they will speak of you as one that rests from his labours, and angel voices shall weave in fairer melody than earth's, at once your epitaph and your destiny—

"QUIETNESS AND ASSURANCE FOR EVER."

XV.

CHRIST OUR ADVOCATE.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins."—1 John ii. 1, 2.

LET us consider—

I. *The nature of the office which Christ as our Advocate sustains.*

II. *The qualifications which he possesses for its fulfilment.*

I. Speaking generally, an advocate is one who intercedes with an offended party on behalf of the offender, or who pleads the cause of an arraigned criminal. In this latter aspect an advocate is opposed to an accuser: the accuser presses the indictment, the advocate conducts the defence. And the office, which Christ has undertaken for his people, is analogous in its nature and in its duties. When "the accuser of the Brethren" prefers and would substantiate his charge, our Advocate pleads our cause and appears for us in the presence of God. There are two or three general remarks upon this office of an Advocate, which it will be well for us to impress upon our minds.

1. *It would seem to be necessary for various reasons that there should be this Mediator between God and man.* God has never suffered the fact of his own existence to be altogether erased from the conscience and from the belief of man. I might almost say further, God has never suffered the fact of the Unity and Spirituality of his existence to be banished from the religions of mankind. It is not a little noticeable how these great Truths of God's unity and spiritual nature lay hidden in the depths of ancient philosophy, and lurked in the vicinity both of savage and of educated idolatries. For this mainly the Jews seem to have been separated, that they might lift up in the sight of all nations a testimony to the Unity of God. The Great Spirit of the American Indians, the all-absorbing Brahm of the Hindu, the Great God of storms whom the grim-faced Calmuck worships—all these, though impersonal abstractions, are refinements of the Unity of God. You find this great Truth underlying the more pretentious mythologies of Greece and Rome. The Pantheon had its multitude of divinities; heroes and demigods divided amongst them the allegiance of the people; but the thought of something superior, incomprehensible, eternal, found an uncertain lodgment in the highest-mounted minds. Greece boasted her Deities, of whose human passion and martial prowess the blind old Homer sang; but all, even to Jupiter, the highest, were subject to an imperial influence, against whose decisions they were powerless. They called this power Fate; but it is easy to discover the truths of the Divine unity and spirituality shining through the mystic veil, and we do not wonder that in later times the dim

yearning should have struggled into expression upon "the altar with this inscription, To the unknown God."

Now the main causes of idolatry are of course to be found in the darkening of a foolish, and in the corruption of a wicked, heart; but, in a secondary sense, it may be questioned whether it has not arisen from the recoil of men's hearts from ideas of the purely spiritual, which they felt their inability to comprehend. You can feel this inability in yourselves; of the spirit-world we know nothing. We feel its subtle influences around us, but we cannot comprehend it. We cannot expound its laws, nor trace its sequences, nor image its inhabitants. If we travel ever so little out of the province of sense, or beyond the material horizon, we are lost. In our bewilderment of faculty, when we strive to comprehend that we may worship, we impersonate Divine attributes, clothe them in material form, and adore the ideal which our own imagination has embodied. The human nature, knowing nothing of the spiritual except in alliance with the bodily, cannot conceive of, much less regard, an abstract spiritual existence.

Hence it seems necessary that there should be some tangible method of communication—some "form of God, which thought it not robbery to be equal with God"—in which the trust of men might rest, and around which the worship of men might gather. The Pagan peoples, in the absence of Revelation, invested their departed heroes with intermediate powers, and constituted them, in some sort, intercessors with the offended Gods. In the dim twilight of the shepherd-age, Job speaks as the representative of

thousands, when he breathes out his complaint, "Neither is there any daysman between us, who can lay his hand upon us both." This want was supplied in the case of the Jews by the sumptuous furniture of their economy. So long as the lawgiver lived and the high priest ministered, so long as the seer's eye had an open vision and the breast of the prophet heaved beneath the swelling Inspiration, so long as the Urim and Thummim flashed unpaled from the breastplate and the Shekinah abode in the awfulness of its own glory—so long had they evidence palpable to the understanding of the Divine and indwelling presence, and foundation strong for faith in the forthputtings of his grace and power. It had been strange, if, in a more glorious economy—the last and utmost of the dispensations of God—man had been left to his own vague conceptions of the unseeen object of his worship; but God has sent his Son into the world, his only Son, whom he loved, and all men now may see the fellowship of the mystery, because "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Here is something to grasp at, something that brings the matters of our highest interest down to the level of our hearts and lives. We need no longer be confused amid the multitude of our thoughts within us. God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The Divinity works not in some subtle laboratory of power, dwells not in a sphere so far away that vulgar vision faints to follow it—"he is not far from any one of us." Out in our daily walks we may meet him. Omnipotence is in the midst of us, healing the leprous and

raising the dead. Omniscience sees Nathanael under the fig-tree oratory, and anticipates for Simon the sifting-time of Satan the destroyer. Omnipresence speaks, and the ruler's little daughter liveth. Eternity tells to wondering listeners of a youth that was elder than Abraham. Who of us is there, whose all of tangible and realizing thought of God does not spring from the life of the Redeemer? Our shrinking flesh and baffled reason own the truth, "No man hath seen God at any time"—but our triumphant faith joyfully finishes the sentence, "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And while with holy reverence, and with fearfulness of the guilt and profanation of Idolatry, we acknowledge, "There is one God"—the God incarnated for us—He gives us the best and highest revelation of himself, and prompts our full thanksgiving for the words that follow, "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

2. *This office of advocacy is essential to the completeness of the priestly office.*—The fact that Christ stands to us in the same relation as did the Jewish high priests to the people, is one to which the Scriptures bear ample and explicit witness: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our

profession, Christ Jesus." "For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

There can be no question that we are taught by these passages, that Christ in his own person became a High Priest for us, and undertook in that capacity all the offices which the superseded priesthood had sustained. Now you remember that the high priest was not only to slay the victim on the annual day of atonement, but to take the fresh blood into the sanctuary, and sprinkle it, yet warm, upon the mercy-seat. The life of the offering, its substantial value and acceptance, was in the blood—"It is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul." But the offerer had not completely fulfilled his duty, until he had sprinkled it within the veil. Moreover, he was to take a censer in his hand, with burning coals from off the altar, that from the sweet incense cast into the fire there might rise the cloud to cover the mercy-seat upon the testimony; and the intercession was required, as well as the atonement, to secure immunity from death. Now all this is typical of Christ. The high priest slew the victim in the outer court of the tabernacle, and in the sight of the people for whom its blood was to atone. Christ also was "evidently set forth" in his passion, and there was a countless host of testimony around the hill of shame. The high priest, bearing the names of the twelve tribes upon his breastplate, lifted the veil with reverent hand, and presented the incense, and offered the intercession in secret and alone: so the veil gathered round the Saviour upon the crest of Olivet,

and the "Holiest" is the faint type of heaven, "whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Thus, as the blood shed upon the altar was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, the blood of richer hue and costlier significance shed for us on earth, has been sprinkled for us in heaven. Until the completion of the sacrifice the priest stands before the altar. "It is finished"—so he sits upon his throne. The priestly act which Christ performs in heaven, as it could not be the offering of a new sacrifice, must then be the presentation of the old—the continual memorial of an expiation which could never lose its lustre, and which could avail for the extremest exigency of his people's need.

And this is the grand design of his ascension into heaven. In his Incarnation he came from the Father to reveal to us the Divine plan, and to work it out by the forthputting of his power. In his Ascension he went back to the Father, announcing the completion of the purpose, claiming the recompense of his glorious toil, and superintending the bestowment of those treasures of salvation which his dying had purchased for mankind. "This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." Oh, this unchangeable priesthood! How the thought of it is presented as an abiding succour to many a manly heart that would else yield to the pressure of its enemies. Other priests become infirm with age, sicken in disease, and die. "He *ever* liveth to make intercession for us." Other priests are limited in their access to the Shekinah; can only approach the presence under certain restrictions, and on a particular day. "Our high priest is passed

into the heavens," and "sits expecting" at once the prayers of his people and the disasters of his foes. Other priests may be deposed by imperial violence or slain by seditious hands. We have a strong and sure consolation, knowing that Christ Jesus, dying once, dieth now no more. Other priests have yielded to corrupting influences, have lost their moral force, and their office has become an effete and shrivelled thing—a titular dignity that only made conspicuous the foulness of the wearer. Our High Priest, spotless in life and mighty in advocacy, has been consecrated, not "after the word of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." The blood that is sprinkled upon other altars is dried up, and its efficacy lasts but for a time. The blood of the nobler Sacrifice, by a chemistry altogether inscrutable, retains through the round of years its freshness and its power. Oh, this unchangeable priesthood! That was a beautiful scene in the history of ancient Israel, when the hosts of Amalek came out to fight with the Hebrews in Rephidim; and while swords flashed and spears glittered in the plain below, on the lone hillside were the intercessor and his helpers, who ruled the changing fortunes of the war. "And when Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand," the Amalekites were masters of the field. That is a *more* beautiful scene, appealing as it does to the home experience of every believer, which takes place full often during the Christian's pilgrimage. The principalities and powers of our hostility gather for the spiritual war, an host encamp against us, our foes beleaguer our path, and endanger our purity and our peace; but yonder, in

imperial elevation, "high on his Father's throne," far above all that is harmful and all that is harassing, our "Intercessor stands, and pours his all-prevailing prayer." His voice knows no faltering, and his hand is not heavy with weariness. He prays for us that our feebleness may be inspirited, and that our faith may not fail. That prayer is heard. The Father regards his pleading Son; a strange courage enters into us, we are nerved either for action or for suffering; and the legions of the enemy, dismayed and crestfallen, are scattered.

II. In every point of view or of conception, "Jesus Christ the righteous" is our perfect Advocate, throughly furnished for every good word and work; and it is matter of difficulty to select those aspects of his qualification, which will most warmly commend him to our regard. We observe—

1. He is a *sympathizing* Advocate. We all know the value of sympathy in the ordinary causes of human arbitration. There is no heart in a hireling, who pleads for the sake of the hire. He may have large attainments and forensic skill, he may argue with convincing logic, and declaim with simulated earnestness; but if there be no principle to inspire him, and no tenderness to inflame his zeal, his eloquence may perhaps be as brilliant, it will certainly be as useless, as a firework display.

But let the man feel in sympathy with the cause he pleads, let his inner chords be struck, let him draw his arguments from his heart-strings, and swelling thought will soon kindle into burning word. It is an unspeakable recommendation of Christ our Advocate,

that he compassionates and has sympathy with us who are the clients of his love. The apostle, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, brings forward this tenderness as indispensable to the fidelity of the office: "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

It is mentioned again as entering of necessity into the character of a priest, that he should "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." And in the prosecution of his argument the apostle shows that because, as God, he could not have the perfect sympathy which comes only from like experience, he for this purpose took on him the fulness of our nature. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." In the sore travail of his incarnate life he learned the necessity of obedience, and the difficulties which to mortals hedge it round. The "strong crying" which he sent up in the time of his agony, was wrung from him that he might cry strongly for us in the time of our utmost need. He was "acquainted with grief," that he might the better plead for its removal. He was a "man of sorrows," that in his own all-embracing experience he might comprehend every conceivable anguish of mankind. Hence we have the strongest guarantee that our Advocate will sympathize with our struggles and sorrows, for he has still the remembrance of his own. Oh, that is an exquisite declaration, upon which it is no wonder that we should so often dwell with lingering

fondness, as loth to lose its comfort for a moment: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Touching is the most palpable of the senses. "Reach hither thy finger, and thrust it into the print of the nails," is a substantial rebuke to unbelief. We have demonstrative evidence of that which our hands have handled "of the word of Life," with the feeling—not an evaporating sentiment roused at the recital of a tale of sorrow, or received from some teacher's lips as one that was proper to be cultivated—touched with the *feeling*, with the veritable experience, the same yoke, the same smart, the same pang of shooting trouble.

"In all points," whether from within or from without—whether the Enemy suggest, or circumstances combine, or interest whisper, or difficulty would seem to compel—"in all points," alike from the promptings of thy weaker nature and from the rude alarms of raging foes—"in all points tempted." Yes, we have a sympathizing Advocate!

Believer, dost thou hear it? There is no trouble which thou canst be called to endure, no sharpness of trial which awaits thee, no dark scene of temptation which may lower upon thy pathway, through which thou wilt not have the comforting and healing presence of thy Saviour. Is Satan desirous to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat? Courage; Christ is praying for thee that thy faith may not fail; and he, in the hour of the power of darkness, was himself tested, and overcame. Art thou in the gripe of poverty, thy

life a perpetual battle between the winner and the spender, dim forebodings clouding thy future, doomed at times almost to feel the truth of the proverb, that "hunger is a sharp thorn"? Look forward, if thou canst see through the darkness, thou wilt descry his form in the distant front, for this is part of the path he trod. Art thou in circumstances yet more difficult than those of actual poverty, feeling the pressure of the times, bewildered with the fierce competitions of business, struggling to maintain the position that has become twined with the associations of years? Perhaps the tempter is busy with thee. Some unlawful undertaking invites, and the bait glitters in his hand of immediate and lucrative returns. Some temporary pressure straitens, and the creation of fictitious capital would afford relief. Some plausible speculation tempts, and by a fortunate throw of the dice thou mayest gamble thyself at once into affluence. The inducements are strong, and the resolution wavers. Make haste and to thy knees, that thou mayest have the benefit of the Intercessor's prayer. Unworthy modes of relief were suggested to him; he knows the strength of the temptation, and the weakness of thy faith. Thy Advocate will ask for strength for thee; and as thou risest, subdued and grateful, thou wilt go forth again to struggle with thy lot, saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Does sin present itself before thee, masked beneath the customs of society, favoured by the opportunities of circumstance, besetting because of thy position, offered by the hand of friendship? All these accumulations combined in the onset of the

Destroyer upon him. Art thou wandering in a wilderness, a solitary way, where thou findest no city to dwell in? Have friends forsaken thee? Is thine an uncheered journey? Have the shadows gathered round thee, and art thou groping in the dense darkness, with nor friend to help nor light to guide? If a flash of lightning comes to give a momentary glare upon the scene, thou wilt see the footprints of the Advocate in the same trodden sand. Art thou travelling consciously and surely to the grave? Steals there over thy senses already the darkening of the dim mystery of death? Dost thou shudder as thou thinkest that here at least no help can avail thee, that thine must be unfriended travel, that thou must pass the grim portals alone? Nay, thou art not alone. Thine Advocate and Redeemer has been here. Approach it without fear. How dark it is! It seems to offer no welcome to the belated traveller, no rest to the weary pilgrim. Ah! but this is its outside aspect. The shutters are close, and they secure the safety and keep out the cold. Enter, and there's light in the sepulchre—steadily burning as it has burnt since it was first hung, there is the bright lamp of the Saviour's love. The tomb, if he is thine Advocate, is to thee no chamber of horrors. It is a lighted hall of waiting—the antechamber in which the guests tarry for awhile until they are summoned to the bridal.

2. He is a *prevalent* Advocate. It is not without reason that the apostle subjoins, "and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." His intercession is founded upon his atonement.

3. He is a *continual* Advocate. The intercession which he manages for his people never ceases through weariness—is not interrupted by the lapse of time. "We *have* an Advocate"—we, in the infancy of the primitive times—we, amid the dark ages of eclipse and sorrow—we, in the subsequent age of revival. Flowing down to us from apostolic days—flowing on from us to those smiling futures of which we dimly see the dawn—believers of all nations and ages have prolonged, and will prolong, the strain until the last man, with its note upon his lips and its blessings at his heart, shall mount from the charred earth to heaven. It is manifest that the advocacy of Christ must be perpetual, because it is founded upon his death; and "he hath obtained eternal redemption for us." The virtue of that death is everlasting, therefore the plea grounded upon that virtue must be everlasting too. The blood must be voiceless, before the intercession can be silent. The blood, sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, and never wiped off, was the emblem of that unceasing advocacy, whose plaintive and prevailing melody is always heard in heaven, and has power with God. The perpetuity of the intercession of Christ follows, moreover, from the perpetuity of his priesthood. He is a High Priest for ever; and therefore, as advocacy is the only priestly act compatible with the excellent glory of the heavenly state, he intercedes for ever. And this is just what we need. Our offences are continually committed, our shortcomings are of daily recurrence; we need, therefore, an atonement continually offered—an intercession that never suspends its prayer.

We have an Advocate! In the long history of the church, our Advocate has watched over its interests, and has screened it from harm. Time after time, signal retribution has come down upon the oppressors of God's people; conspiracies have been frustrated, rebels baffled in their schemes; the weapons of the aliens have fallen from their paralyzed arm; Ahithophel's counsel has been turned to foolishness; blessing has come out of Shimei's complicated wrong; and the wondrous bush, girdled with fire as with a garment, has come unconsumed from amid the fronds of flame. Profanity has ascribed all this to chance; Natural Religion, to the fitness of things; Philosophy has talked about fortuitous combinations; Fatalism has muttered of destiny; but Faith, with better wisdom, sees the Man at the right hand, and has gone blithely on, singing in its joyous pilgrimage:

> "The Father hears him pray,
> His dear Anointed One;
> He cannot turn away
> The presence of his Son."

We have an Advocate! And because we have, the thunder has slumbered in its cloud, and the Angel has passed harmlessly over us, and the arm of an offended God has not been lifted from its merciful repose. We have an Advocate! And around this truth should cluster our all of gratitude for the past, and of anticipation for the future. Looking upon the face of the Anointed, God has borne with our ill-manners, and has subdued our hardness, and has supplied us with all the grace we have. We draw our every blessing through the entreaties of the Advocate. He

pleads for our justification, and the glad Spirit hastes to bear swift and brilliant witness. He pleads for daily pardon of daily shortcoming and sin, and we go down to our houses justified. He pleads for progressive holiness, and the indwelling grace comes down. He asks for power of resistance, and we become brave, and our hearts swell with a strange heroism. He presents our service, weak and worthless in itself, and the voice issues from the throne—"They shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory." He entreats for triumph over death, and the glassy eye lights up with a fire more piercing than its youthful glances knew; and the tongue, which all thought sealed in silence, is loosened for a dying-spirit hymn, "O death! where is thy sting?" He pleads for full salvation, in all the depth and eternity of that royal word; and hosts of the ransomed—a great cloud of witnesses—crowd to the battlements of heaven to bear their testimony to the listening sons of men: "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

He is the exclusive Advocate. He was the only Redeemer, and by consequence he is the only Intercessor. "He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none" to help him; and only he is authorized to appear for us in the presence of God. "Neither is there salvation in any other." To associate others with him in the work of advocacy, is to cast a reflection either upon his ability or willingness to save. We don't want many mediators; we want one.

It may be predicated safely, that those who have proper views of the sacerdotal act of sacrifice, will have proper views of the sacerdotal act of intercession. Hence the church which dishonours him by supplementing the fires of purgatory to supply the defect of his atonement, dishonours him by invocating saints and angels to supply the defect of his intercession. "There is one," and only one, "Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Alas! that men will employ advocates who can gain no hearing, and whose suit cannot possibly prevail. That poor Romanist, telling his beads, and repeating his litanies with an intenseness and a fervour worthy of a better toil—what is he doing? He has put his cause into the hands of another advocate, some frail mortal like himself, whom his church has canonized for the sake of hire. Why the hair shirt and the spiked bedstead, the fasts of rigid mortification, and the vigils so long protracted that slumber gets frightened at the staring eyes, and that which was begun as an austerity becomes its own penalty—a nervous system utterly, and perhaps fatally, unstrung? The devotee has made his penance his advocate, instead of casting his burden upon Christ. The reputable worldling, why is he so eager in benevolence? Why piles he up his charities with no niggard hand? Why with such punctilious observance fulfils he to the letter the requirements of that severe ritual? He has made his righteousness his advocate, and is hoping to come by its means unto God. And thou sad penitent, who hast for so long mingled thy drink with weeping, thou art making thy tears thy advocate, so long as thou lookest not to Christ.

XVI.

DECEIVED SOWERS TO THE FLESH.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."—GAL. vi. 7–9.

AMONG the trials to which the great Apostle of the Gentiles was subjected, and among the sharpest in the series, because he was wounded by them through the hearts of others, were what he himself denominates "perils from false brethren." Close upon his track, in many of the places where he had successfully preached the Gospel, and had formed the faithful into compact and flourishing churches, came a troop of heretical teachers, preaching divers and strange doctrines, and drawing away the hearts of many. Amongst the most active and dangerous of these were certain men from Jerusalem, who would fain have grafted Christianity upon Judaism, and have imposed upon the Gentiles the rigidness of legal observance and submission to the yoke of circumcision. As Paul was known to entertain more liberal opinions, they were especially inflamed against him, and compassed sea and land to counterwork him in his holy toil. At the

period at which this epistle was written, Paul was probably at Corinth. He had gone there with a saddened heart, for there too he had had to mourn over the unstable, and perverse, and impure, and his presence was demanded that the due administration of discipline might be secured upon the offenders. It is supposed that as there was regular and speedy communication between Ephesus and Corinth, the tidings of the defection in Galatia had struck upon him, on his arrival at the latter city, with painful surprise. They had received him on his first visit as if he had been an angel from heaven, and he bears them record that they loved him with an affection so ardent, "that if it had been possible," they "would have plucked out" their "own eyes, and have give them to" him. Their rebellion against him was therefore the more distressing, and he grieves over their apostasy, and ascribes it to the enchantments of some unholy spell. The false teachers had not scrupled to use falsehood and slander to sow the seeds of alienation in their minds. They had charged him with dissimulation, with a desire to keep his converts in a condition of subordinate privilege, with interested partisanship, and especially with usurping an apostolic authority to which he had no rightful claim, inasmuch as he was not among the number of the original twelve. His purpose, therefore, in this epistle was to vindicate his independent apostleship, to contradict the falsehoods of his designing adversaries, and to show that their Judaizing teachings would reduce Christianity to an effete and cumbrous ceremonial—blemished of its beauty, shorn of its strength, and crippled utterly of its spirituality and

grandeur. After he has in masterly argument established these positions, he proceeds, as his manner was, to warn against besetting danger, and to inculcate practical duty; and some of the most faithful admonishings, which ever proceeded from his pen, were prompted by that wholesome severity to which his tenderness for their welfare constrained him.

We need not remind you that the Galatians have no monopoly of inconstancy, that a fickle religious adherence is the bane of thousands everywhere, and that multitudes in all ages and in all lands—true children of Reuben—might have affixed to them his character, as at once a brand and a prophecy, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." It cannot, therefore, be amiss for us to examine into the grounds of our own hope; for haply, by carefully pondering the apostle's words, we may be roused and delivered from some imminent moral peril.

The first thing which strikes us in the words we have chosen, is *the solemnity of the apostle's warning:* "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He seems to intimate that such is the audacious wickedness of the human heart, that it has within it so many latent mazes of iniquity, that they might be self-deceived either as to their apprehensions of that which was right before God, or as to their own actual condition in his sight; and he tells them that God is not mocked by this pretended service—that to him all hearts are open, and that in impartial and discriminating arbitration he will render to every man according to his deeds. Brethren, if there be but a possibility

of this, it behoves us to take earliest warning. On a matter like this it is impossible to exaggerate the danger. It is sad to be deceived in a friend; to waste the heart's living water upon the sand, to expend the treasures of a confiding affection upon an ingrate who, in recreant haste, will lift up the heel against his benefactor. It is sad to be deceived in our estimate of health; to wake up to the sudden consciousness that insidious disease has been sapping the strength for years, and that we inherit feebleness instead of vigour, and burning instead of beauty, and a fascinating damask, which is but the tinting for the tomb. It is sad to be deceived in our computation of property; to imagine ourselves affluent, and to gather round us comforts for life's tranquil evening, and then to be confronted in a moment with embarrassment and with the prospect of penury; to see all our household objects, each one the shrine of some holy association or of some tender and happy memory, vanish from our sight, and the very home of our childhood become the dwelling of the stranger.

But great as is the sadness of these deceptions, they are not without mitigation nor beyond repair. A truer friendship may build up the breaches of the heart, which had been dismantled by the false one's treachery; the labour of years may discharge the liabilities with honour, and repurchase the alienated home; even health may bloom again upon the faded cheek, through the blessing of God upon the skill of the healer. But a mistake about the state of the soul—deception on this, the most momentous of all matters—a veil folded about the heart so that it cannot see

its own helplessness and peril—this is a state of which thought shudders to conceive, and to describe whose portentousness language has no words that are sufficiently appalling. The causes which induce this self-deception are the same as those, which operate to produce similar results in other matters than those of the soul's relation to God. How is the health ruined, but by reckless exposure, by prodigal waste of strength, by neglect of trifling ailments until they grow into giant maladies, by an overweening confidence which will not believe in the reality of peril? How do men entail embarrassment upon their circumstances? By hazardous ventures, by the indulgence in that cupidity which, in its haste to be rich, would fain gamble itself into affluence; by the ostentatious speed which grasps at luxuries before comforts are earned; by the doggedness which refuses to admit the possibility of danger, and which, to save itself from honest humiliation, goes on to fraudulent bankruptcy. The same conditions, brethren, are largely the conditions of this state of spiritual ruin. Men talk of health and peace, when the whole head is sick with the confusion of intellectual error, and the whole heart is faint with the lassitude of mortal sin. Men imagine themselves rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing, when they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Perhaps their delusive hope may have been fostered in them by their inflexible adhesion to some favourite doctrine. They have remembrances of the former time, when the joy of the Lord was their strength, when the willing spirit revelled in the exercises of devotion, when the Bible was a

treasure, and the Sabbath a queenly privilege, and the sanctuary the audience-chamber where the King received his guests, and the closet the pavilion where he hid them from the strife of tongues. Things are not so with them now. But they live upon the memory of the past; they blow every now and then at the white ashes of their hearts' former fires, and say, "Aha! I am warm!" when there is a "lie in their right hand, and a deceived heart hath turned them aside." Or perhaps they are zealous in all the ordinances of religion, present in the house of prayer with almost obtrusive punctuality, noisy in their enthusiasm for the welfare of the denomination, warm in their admiration of the minister's discourses, sometimes experiencing a glow as they are told of Christ's perfection of beauty and of love, and sometimes checked by a spasm of remorse in some projected wrong-doing, and without any close examination they rest satisfied with their state, and talk fluently of the heaven into which they anticipate their ushering, and of the rest in whose dreamless blessing they hope by and by to abide. Or perhaps—and this is the more frequent experience of such an one—they habitually exclude from their thoughts the faintest apprehension of danger. Their hearts are like ancestral rooms in some lordly mansion, but rarely entered by the owner; and they are content to go on recklessly from month to month and year to year, drowning contemplation in ostentatious activity, and hoping that some miracle will rouse them from their languor, and will heal them of their palsy at last.

Brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, are any of

you in such a case? Are you among the blinded and lost ones to whom the Gospel is hid? Have you resisted the Spirit so long, that he but seldom and feebly strives with you? Have a care, I beseech you, for there can be no peril more imminent than yours. The headlong rider through the darkness, before whom the dizzy precipice yawns; the heedless traveller for whom, in the bosky woodland, the bandits lie in ambush, or upon whom, from the jungle's density, the tiger waits to spring; the man who, gazing faintly upward, meets the cruel eye and lifted hand and flashing steel of his remorseless enemy—they of whose condition, thank God, you can only poorly image, who, in far dungeons and beneath the tortures of a tyrant's cruelty, groan for sight of friend or glimpse of day, all around whom perils thicken hopelessly, and to whom, with feet laden with the tidings of evil, the messengers of disaster come—how *they* move your sympathy! how you shudder as you dwell upon their danger! how you would fain stir yourselves into brave efforts for their rescue or their warning!

Brethren, your own danger—the peril which like a thick cloud wraps you at this moment round—is more nearly encompassing, and is more infinitely terrible. You are deceiving yourselves, you are haply deceiving your fellows, but you are not deceiving God—"God is not mocked." He sees the whited wall and the enclosed corruption—you cannot impose on him. I implore you, take warning in time. Go in penitence to-night, delay not a moment, for the business requires haste. "Flee"—be immediate and urgent—"from the wrath to come." Christ waits to stream light upon your long

darkness, and to smile your uncertainty and unbelief away. Only rest on him, and the scales shall fall from your eyes, and the veil shall be lifted from your heart; and in the rapture of your new-found and well-warranted confidence you shall know that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

We come next to consider *the import of the apostle's statement*, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." The term here rendered "flesh" has a wider meaning than it had of yore; and the desires of the flesh constructively include all those, whether depraved or refined, which are indulged without reference to God, which appeal not to his law for their warrant, nor to his favour for their gratification. The desires of the Spirit are those which come from his inspiration, and find in his approval their recompense and joy. The apostle represents the provision which men make for the fulfilment of these desires under the analogy of ordinary husbandry—as a sowing respectively to the flesh and to the Spirit—and he announces that the result will follow by inevitable sequence, of a harvest similar to the seed. He who would gather the wheat into the garner, must scatter the wheat seed in the furrow. Barley and rye will come each from their own seed; and tares, if an enemy stealthily scatter them while the husbandman and his fellows slumber. It is manifest, then, that the great principle which the apostle would impress upon us, is that we have largely the

making or the marring of our own future—that in the thoughts we harbour, and in the words we speak, and in the silent deeds which, beaded on Time's string, are told by some recording angel as the story of our lives from year to year, we shape our character, and therefore our destiny for ever: "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." For the full understanding of the meaning of the passage, it may be well to remark further, that the term "corruption" in the text is not to be understood as denoting moral vileness—a signification which it frequently bears—but rather dissolution and decay. The corruption is the antithesis to the eternal life. The one tells of the brief, the other of the boundless; the one of the early fading, the other of the everlasting. The lesson which is taught us here is the same as that which Peter teaches, when he says that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever;" and the same which John so forcibly affirms: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever;" and the same which is implied in the words of our Lord himself when he speaks of the hypocrites, who pray to be seen of men, and "who have"—that is, do now enjoy—"their reward." The Christian has not his reward—he waits for it; this world were too narrow an area for the display of his costly treasures. They who sow for this world reap in this world, and may outlive their own harvests; they who sow to the Spirit seek for

Christian Reward

abiding issues, and their harvest has not yet come. Thus it is evident, that when we are told that they who sow to the flesh—that is, they whose desires terminate in the present sphere—shall of the flesh reap corruption—that is, that which will pass from them and will cease to be—it is but the utterance of a common and natural law, and is in keeping with the thousand analogies which come familiarly with every day. It is equivalent to saying that men get but what they seek, and should be satisfied. They get the harvest, scanty or plenteous as it may be, according to the seed they sow. Look on the village green, "when in the prime of summer-time, an evening calm and cool, four and twenty happy boys come bounding out of school." Watch them in their rapture of life which no languor has yet enfeebled. Mark how in their frolicsome play "there are some that run and some that leap, like troutlets in a pool." What are they seeking there? They are seeking amusement for the present hour. This is the ultimatum of their desire. They have no thought of the future—they reck not of the morrow's tasks nor of the morrow's rod. And they get just what they seek, and nothing else. Neither learning nor fortune come to them in their sportive hours. And so in all the world's professions, and pursuits, and ventures, and toils. The citizen whose soul is in his counting-house, burrowing through life with the share lists for his catechism and the ledger for his Bible, amasses often the competency upon which his heart is set, but he surrenders the bays of genius and the laurel of conquest, and the flowers of youth find no moisture in the hard, dry,

wistful brow on which they rest, and therefore droop early and die. He gets the one thing for which he has offered up the blush and vigour of his manliness, but he gets nothing beside. He sows to the flesh, and of the flesh he reaps; and that which he reaps, because it has no root in the invisible, in the time of storm or shaking soon vanisheth away.

Brethren, there are two worlds with which you are connected; you who are sowing to the flesh *may* sow to the Spirit if you choose. If you prefer the present enjoyment to the abiding enjoyment, it is at your option to do so; but you must take your choice with all its conditions, and you must not complain if the recompenses of the world which you reject are justly and inflexibly denied. Those conditions are sometimes exacting and rigid. It may be that, choosing this world, and sowing for it, you will have a blighted harvest even on your own field. It may be that, choosing the other world, and sowing for it, you may be inexorably barred from all comfort and affluence in this; or it may be—we cannot tell—that God may make golden sheaves to brown and wave before you, as a sort of first-fruits of the harvest that is to come. But you must take the lot as it falls—possible enjoyment now, with loss and pain for ever; or possible indigence and reproach and suffering now, with an approving conscience and an incorruptible crown. "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

There are three special kinds of "sowers to the flesh" whom the apostle seems to have had in mind—*the*

proud, the covetous, the ungodly; all these, by certain expressions in the context, would appear to have been before him, as likely to be deceived, and as reaping only the world's transitory harvest. You will observe that they are all *spiritual* sins—sins of which human law takes no cognisance, and to which codes of earthly jurisprudence affix no scathing penalty. On this very account, however, they are fraught with immeasurably greater danger. Men are not likely to deceive themselves as to their state while they know that they are fraudulent and ferocious, that they frequent the drunkard's revel, and follow in the harlot's train; they bear the name in their foreheads of the master under whom they serve. Before a man can be intemperate or profligate, he must have sorely wounded his own self-respect, and have suffered somewhat in social status, and in his neighbours' honourable esteem. There is a brand upon the drunkard—he bears it in his purpled face and palsied hand; his harvest comes home fast, and is soon ripe for the sickle of the reaper. The licentious man sins against his own flesh, and reaps the fruit of his doings in numberless and complicated maladies. *Now* he is the loathing of those who judge rightly of his fearful crime, and in the days of the world's moral manhood—which, we trust, are coming rapidly—he will be scouted out of drawing-rooms, where his effrontery now blazons out his shame, and shunned by all the high-born and womanly as a leper whose very presence is contagion. But a man may be haughty, and avaricious, and ungodly, and his neighbours shall praise him in the gate, and his very sins shall be accounted virtues; and

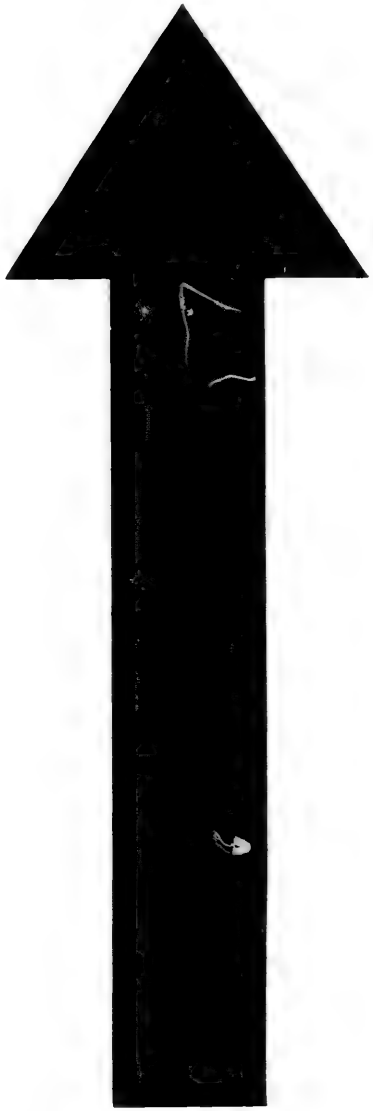
for that, for which he is verily guilty before God, he shall be had among God's fallen creatures in honour. There is the greater need, therefore, that these spiritual sins should be disclosed in all their enormity, and shown in their exceeding sinfulness, and in their disastrous wages, in order that men may be left without excuse, if they persist wilfully to believe a lie.

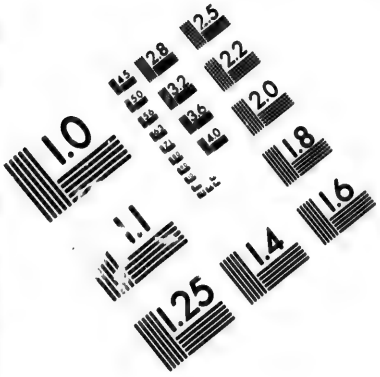
The apostle refers evidently to the proud, when in the third verse of the chapter he says, "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." He intimates that such is the subtle and plausible nature of the sin, that they are likely to be deceived by it, and so fall into the snare of the devil; and you cannot wonder that it should be so regarded, if you remember throughout all ages what incalculable mischief it has done. It was the prime element in the first transgression. "Ye shall be as gods," sank from the Tempter's glozing lips into the hearts of our first parents—and the contented became ambitious, and the ambitious became rebel, and Eden was forfeited, and Humanity fell. It is the secret prompter to overt acts of evil. Let there but be the lifting up of the heart—as in Absalom, for his personal beauty; as in Haman, for his court favour; as in Herod, for his adulation and authority; as in Nebuchadnezzar, for his kingly power—and the determined crime lingers not far behind. It is the blemish which hides the comeliness even of good men; let it lurk in the heart, and David will arrogantly number the people, and Hezekiah will ostentatiously lead Babylon's ambassadors through his chambers of treasure; and even Moses, provoked at the waters of Meribah,

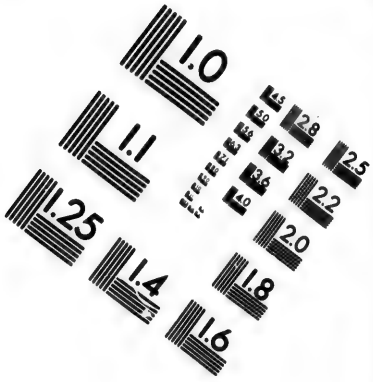
will give it triumphant expression—"Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" It is the hidden spring of opposition which confirmed the Jews in their audacious unbelief, and which in the infidel heart refuses to be convinced by evidence, and which keeps many a poor miserable sinner wandering in disquietude and tears. Brethren, are you thus sowing to the flesh? then of the flesh you can but reap corruption. Men see you, and talk about you, and wonder at your beautiful complexion, either of skin or mind; and you may rejoice as the breath of their applause sweeps over you—but there is corruption in it even as it breathes. It is an east wind, cold and dry; and God, who is merciful ever, will soon cause it to change. Meanwhile he is not mocked: he sees you, both as you scatter the seed and as you gather the harvest. In present denunciation of your arrogance, he tells you, "Him that hath a high look and a proud heart, will not I suffer;" and in prophetic sentences of doom, "That the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down." Oh, persevere not in your pride, for it can but tend to your irrevocable fall. God respecteth not the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble; and many a downcast spirit has thrilled with unearthly gladness as it has listened to his words, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

There is the covetous man too, who may deceive himself, abstain from his distinctly understood duty, baptize his avarice by some Scripture name, and deem that the association has hallowed it into a virtue.

Does he not exist amongst you? If he does not, you are a congregation marvellously pure; for so numerous are the idolaters at this sordid shrine, that when the Saviour looked upon the various forms of sad and conflicting evil—evil so diversified as to be defiant of all human classification—he who knew what was in man, and could trace each giant passion to its source, beheld the whole world ranged under the banners of but two commanders: there were the servants of God, and there were the servants of Mammon. And the worship of this, "the least erect of the spirits that fell from heaven," is yet patronized as extensively as ever. Men take advantage of the impalpable boundary which is supposed in this instance to separate vice from virtue, and the love of money, which they know to be within them, they contrive to indulge decorously under another name — thrift, frugality, industry, provision for the wants of a household, prudent carefulness, diligence in business, regard for the interests of children—all these are often only aliases under which, when it is brought up for judgment, covetousness might be indicted and condemned. It is the emperor of the vices, and they are vassals to perform its will. It guides the artist's pencil, and it fires the poet's brain. It presides equally when the rich "pull down their barns" to extend them, and when the poor "strike" into deeper and drearier poverty. It pays the emigrant's passage, and loosens the orator's tongue, and inspires the gambler's glance, and guides the forger's pen, and lurks behind the burglar's visor, and whets the assassin's steel. There is hardly a branching ill in the whole tree, which has not this for its







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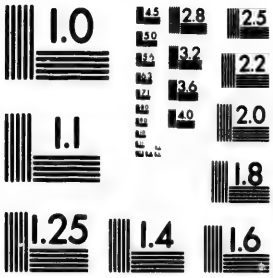

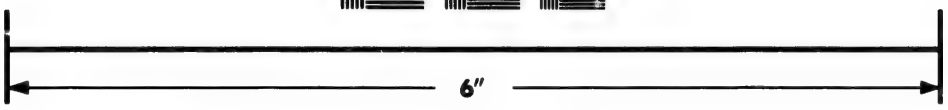

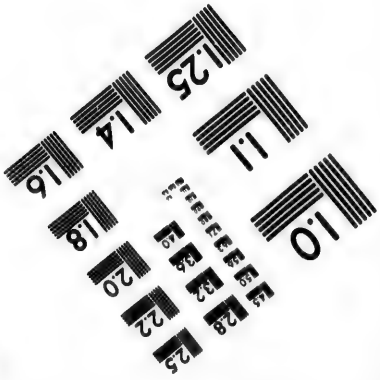

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root. In things secular and things sacred it has alike intruded, and it reigns as an all but universal autocrat, without an organization, but without a rival. Are you not conscious, when you closely examine, that it has a hold upon yourselves? Ye who deem ye have no time to attend to the concerns of eternity, because this world and its provision necessitates your engrossing labour—ye men of business, to whom tact and push are more valuable qualities than principle—ye hard, sharp-witted bargainers, whose boast it is that ye have never been outdone—ye whom appeals for charity startle and repel, and to whom every requirement of generosity is as a Shylock cruelty, though it may shed no drop of Christian blood—ye who have long ago realized a competency, but who rush as eagerly and fiercely as you ever did into the strife for gold—are you not in this form sowing to the flesh? And surely you will reap corruption. You have your reward. You have attained what you sought—the money is yours. Failure may not rob you of it. Panic may not give it wings. Thieves may despair to abstract it. In substantial property and in punctually returning dividend it may minister to your comfort for years, and you may walk in its satisfied infatuation for a brief hour of magnificence until the end come. But alas! for you, if this is all! Look into the future, and you will see a tottering frame, bowed with the heaviness of years, and riches cannot straighten it; a shrivelled hand, which can neither grasp the title-deed nor count the treasure; a sad and shrouded effigy, which has no use for riches save to paint a hatchment, and borrow a hireling livery of plumes,

and pile the pomp of marble on the grave. And what beyond?—a naked spirit, with no trappings of wealth about it, going up in the unseen world to judgment, and a voice speaking, "The covetous man the Lord abhorreth." "If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity." So is he that heapeth up treasure, "and knoweth not who shall gather it."

XVII.

MOUNT MORIAH.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."—HEB. xi. 17, 18.

WE can many of us remember our first hearing of this narrative, from some mother's lips or at some hoary grandsire's knee—how we listened with the enlarging eyes of childhood wonder—how our romance was thrilled with deepening interest at each successive point in the story—how we held the breath when we came to the bound victim and the lifted knife, and breathed freely, and in sweet relief, when we saw Abraham glance at the thicket, and discover and substitute the entangled ram.

Perhaps there is no Old Testament incident which sooner grasps, and longer lingers in, the memories of children. We want you to visit Mount Moriah with us to-day; and to do it profitably we must carry the child-heart with us yet—as sensitive to impression, and as eager in interest—while we try to elicit, with all the vigour of a manly understanding, the principles which are illustrated. The thought rushes on us as we speak, How fresh this subject seems to us! It is

like well-loved poetry or inspiring music—we never tire of it—it rather endears itself by repetition. It is one of the oldest incidents in the world, and yet there is a perpetual youth about it, and it is fertile in instruction now. There are some things which Time cannot kill. It has a marvellous power of ruin. Courts and cabinets dwindle at its breath. Dynasties are upheaved in its march, as the foam upon the crest of the wave. It frets decay upon the temple-pile, and upon the oriel's delicate tracery. It makes mounds of monarchies; and of the palaces, where once royalty queened and beauty revelled, a roofless ruin, where owls hoot from the decaying towers, and where the panther makes his lair. But there are some things over which Time has no power. He cannot touch thought. It lives, grows, ripens in his despite. Tradition overlives the many tombs in which he inters the years. Memory mocks him to destroy her. The humanness of the heart is an enduring thing. Hence it is that patriarchal tales—tales of fear, and joy, and wrong, and sorrow—find their swift way to the men of all the world's ages. There is nothing hackneyed in them, because they appeal to feelings that are eternal, and strike chords that are never out of tune. We ask fearlessly, therefore, for your interest in the reminiscences which make sacred this land of Moriah, because Abraham's and yours is one common manhood, gifted with one common birthright, and born for the achievement of one common destiny.

Few hills are haunted by so many hallowed memories as this mount of Moriah. Not only was it the scene of Abraham's trial, but in later years, when the

destroying arm was uplifted against Jerusalem, and the pestilence wrought its work of woe, the Lord smelled the smell of the burnt-offerings which rose from this mountain, and was entreated for the people, for it was here that the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite stood. Later still, in high magnificence upon its crest, rose up the temple of Solomon; and if not upon the self-same spot, it was on a ridge in the same chain of hills, that in the fulness of time it behoved the Redeemer of the world to die.

We are chiefly concerned, however, at present, with the sacrifice of Abraham; for though in merciful interposition the knife glanced harmlessly from the only son, it was a consummated sacrifice in the eye of Heaven. It is simply impossible for us to dwell upon all the points which this suggestive narration presents; but, as a general guide to our thought, we may remind you that it gives us interesting illustrations of faith as

I. *Tried.*
II. *Triumphing.*

There is much of striking incident in the life of Abraham, and we have the opportunity of seeing him in variously developed character; but he never comes so near to us—never touches and thrills our sympathies so much—as on this mount of Moriah.

Our first introduction to him in his ancestral city of Ur is interesting, for it exhibits his early possession of that firm faith, in God, which is the ground of all his subsequent greatness. At God's command he left his patrimonial home, and wandered into a far country

with no definite bourne before him, but with an assured confidence that a young nation was within him as he trod his God-guided way. We see him then the opulent father of a colony—lord of broad lands; a large-acred sheik — wealthy in flocks and treasure, but still serving the Lord, for his every tent had its companion altar; then the patriarch become a warrior, and at the head of his own train-bands he pursues the bandit kings, and recovers the captives of their bow and spear. With bated breath we see the patriarch bow his head reverently to pay the tithes and to drink in the blessing, as that robed and sceptred mystery comes forth who is called King of Salem; and we think insensibly of him, who is a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. We next find his faith honoured by God's covenant, solemnly ratified after the manner of Eastern tribes; and then he rises into his loftiest heroism, as the daysman of the doomed cities of the plain. We follow him through these successive stages in his history with an admiration which, when he pleads with such commanding boldness before God, deepens into a breathless awe. But there is nothing yet that strikes upon our consciousness; we have no affinity of experience—we feel about him, but we cannot feel with him. We study his history, just as we study the history of some crusader of Cœur-de-Lion's band, or of some Nestor or Ajax before the walls of Troy, or of any of the world's notables, who have passed through circumstances which are never likely to happen to ourselves. But in this scene on Moriah we are penetrated by very different feelings. He comes down to our own

level. He feels and is tried as a father; and the father's heart depends not upon clime or language, is traduced through every generation, beats with the same young and throbbing pulses for ever.

There is a divinity about his other acts; there is a humanness about his trial. And just as we are dazzled by the sun, when his meridian glory streams upon us, but feel almost a fellowship with him as he struggles through the gloom of an eclipse, so we admire Abraham, until he is severely tried, with an admiration distant and passionless; but we are subdued into sympathy by his suffering. Our hearts are wrung as we go with him on the three days' pilgrimage; we feel the sickening of spirit, with which he lifts the arm to offer faith's bravest sacrifice; and, as if it had been ourselves, we rejoice with him in the homeward journey. Our hearts bound as we see the familiar tent, as we feel the loving greeting, and as we witness the welcoming kiss pressed upon the lips of the delivered one by the all-unconscious mother.

We can conceive of no greater trial of faith than that to which our attention is now directed. Just imagine his exercises of mind as he hears the command given. He could not doubt for a moment that it was God who spake; he knew the familiar voice too well to be mistaken in its tones. Revelation was an ordinary thing to him. God had often talked to him in condescending friendliness. Already six times had a special word from the Lord hallowed his night seasons; shall he doubt this—the crown, the perfecting, the seventh? Not a question would arise within him as to the reality of the Divine communication. It might

seem strange, startling, cruel—a command without a reason—but it would strike at once upon his heart as God's command, which he was under obligation to obey. There then it sounded in his ears, a mandate unrelieved in its bareness, sharp as a cautery, abrupt as a humbling truth when it is somewhat roughly told—and we feel the manner almost as much as the substance of the message—driving all slumber from the tired eyelids, and filling the night watches with meditations of suspense and struggle. Who shall tell how thought, perplexed and rapid, filled up the burdened minutes of those waking hours?—how the mind went "about it and about it," searching for some nascent comfort, or hidden hope, or loophole for avoidance, or at least justification for delay!—how the fancy would fain have goaded the will into rebellion, and brain and heart—like skiffs, the playthings of the storm—were tossed in one mad whirl together! Reason could readily find argument to prove the command unlikely, and to make the duty difficult. There was the apparent inconsistency of the requirement with the character of Jehovah, and with all former displays of that character in the sight of men. It was a seeming vindictiveness inexplicable in a God of love—a delight in blood more congenial to sanguinary idols—the Astarte of Chaldea, and the Moloch of Moab—than to the Holy One who made both heaven and earth. There was the scandal which it would assuredly cause amongst the scoffing idolaters around—the mockery which would not spare the gibe: "Is this the end of your service, and the reward of your faith?"—the bitter derision that would gleam in the eyes and scorch from

the tongue of those, to whom Abraham's life had been a keen power of rebuke: "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou—the pattern, the reprover—become like unto us, whom thou hast so often silenced and shamed?"—the snare which it would be to those who, by the patriarch's persuasion and example, were half won to adopt the purity of his worship. Above all, there was the promise, long and fondly dwelt upon, which seemed to hang round the neck of Isaac, as an armlet defiant of harm: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Oh, it had been easy, in the view of these seemingly invincible difficulties, for Abraham to have bewildered himself with questions to which he could realize no possible reply. Is it likely that Jehovah would thus contradict his every former illustration of his mercy, belie the testimony which I have given of him among the heathen, falsify his own dear and plighted word? He has sent me here to be his witness: will he defeat his own purpose now? Is he relentless and blind? Has he given me this brief tenure of a blessing, only to sharpen in an aged heart the pangs of a more terrible trial? Is his miracle to be cut short after all, and the late-born to be the only called? That promise—it made a large demand upon my faith at first: is it to be after all abortive?—a lying oracle, true to the ear, but false to the hope and to the sense? Sarah, my faithful wife, is her heart too to be wrung, and by my hand? Can God require this, that the father's hand shall strike his home childless, and the husband's obedience estrange the wife's affection? Isaac himself—he is young and strong, sinewy in the strength of manhood's early prime, will he

acquiesce unresistingly, and be bound a willing victim for the sacrifice?—Isaac, whom I cannot assure of the certainty of my revelation. and who may die with a hate of his unnatural father—is it he, whom I, his father, am required to slay?

It may be that all these questions vexed the father's heart in that long night of weeping. Surely this is faith tried in the fire. The fiery trial would be, moreover, increased by the deliberateness with which the act was to be accomplished. It was not simply the sudden effort of heroism, the momentary rending of the heart-strings in the chivalry of obedience to duty; it was the mind kept at its utmost tension for three long days, wrung continuously by every sight and sound. Associate armies can rush upon bright steel, but the biting frost of a Russian winter does *more* to eat out the heart of their courage. Men lessen their sorrows by sharing them; and there are few troubles that cannot be charmed, like Saul's, by the music of some dear whispering voice. Here was the requirement of patient endurance—endurance ever wakeful to the consciousness of its own agony—endurance that must be borne alone—endurance culminating in that climax of unspeakable sorrow, when the father's soul, already overcharged, was almost broken by the innocent question: "My father, here are the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" O ye, who bear about with you for years a lacerating sorrow which you may not tell—ye who wear dead leaves about your heart, and through a life of broken-heartedness can even hear them rustle—ye who gaze upon faces better loved than life, and see

the stern sculptor chiselling them for the tomb—ye who see in the nearing prospect some great agony of spirit which you shall presently be called to abide—ye can in some sort enter into the bitterness of this grand old man; ye can form some scanty conception of that requirement of illimitable sacrifice which wrung, the while it changed not, his fixed, unfaltering soul. Do you ask, Why this severity of trial? why does God thus try the faith of his servants, and surround them with a hedge of adverse circumstances, or make their life a constant warfare and struggle? Why is the athlete subjected to the strictest regimen of diet and exercise, restricted to a very despotism of regularity—why, but that when the trial comes his thews may be as brass and iron? Why is the soldier taught to endure hardness, and to smile at pain, but that he may fight manfully and well? He is drilled before the fight impends, that he may be laurelled when the fight is won. Why do the fierce flames gather and hiss about the bar of gold, but to scorch the dross away from it? Why does the knife shear the glossy leaves and pierce into the quick life of the fruit-bearing tree, but that it may be pruned into greater plenty, and into ampler fruit? Brethren, is your faith tried? is your prospect dreary? do a crowd of difficulties heap your heavenward way? God has a purpose for you of higher grace or more extensive duty. Don't rashly part company with those stranger trials; speak them friendly, for it may be that when you harbour them you shall entertain angels unawares. God never employs his chosen without previous training—Moses in the wilderness of Midian; David in Engedi's desolate hold;

Joseph in the desert-pit and the Egyptian prison; Daniel in captivity; John in Patmos; Paul in fetters, and with Satan's messenger busy with his buffetings within—all these are God's children at school. Sorrow is the grim teacher of that higher education, which alone fits them for divine work in the world. And remember, in the moment of your fiercest trial, it is *only* trial, not destruction. The wrestler shall not faint beneath the discipline, nor the soldier be deserted in the field. The refiner sits by the furnace, and the pruner never kills the tree. It is not anger but love which chastises—love, which directs the process and rejoices in the result of blessing—love, which clears the day for the strength, or distributes the strength for the day; which adjusts the burden to the back, and strengthens the back for the burden—love, which tempers the wind, and watches the fire, and makes a way of escape out of every temptation; which opens doors of hope in Achor's valley, digs wells in the desolate Baca, and sweetens the Marah fountain; which bruises Satan under the feet of those whom he has tempted; which revives the heart of the contrite ones, and offers to the weary conquerors the rest, and the palm-branch, and the crown.

Let no Christian murmur, therefore, that he is in the bright succession of suffering; that he is persecuted as the prophets were before him; that he treads the thorny way confessors trod; that he is cast into the furnace; nor even that the flames are heated seven times hotter than the wont. It is God's high ordination for usefulness, and baptism for honour—"that the trial of your faith, being

much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 7). It is the very badge of your legitimacy—"For if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." It is the subtle element which, in sure but hidden working, is preparing your inheritance—"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

II. Terrible as was the trial, the good man's faith overcame; fierce as was the struggle, the obedience triumphed; costly as was the sacrifice, it was freely offered, in heart and purpose, upon the altar of the Lord. The crisis came suddenly. But a Christian is not bewildered in a crisis which appals the stoutest worldling. His principles do not fail him in emergencies. The hidden word within his heart starts up, comforting and resolute, when the hail dashes against the windows, and the enemy cometh in like a flood. His hope, if he can only grasp it, is all-sustaining in the storm. The summons came probably at night; and when coward hearts would have turned recreant, and timid faith would have delayed, he was prompt in his obedience, for he rose up early in the morning. Postponing everything to the supreme obligation of religious duty, knowing no hesitancy when he had once been impressed with the convictions of right, trampling upon natural affection at the bidding of him who had implanted it, going steadily to his living

martyrdom with a heart which bled but blenched not, persevering through each temptation of caress and reproach in his torturing self-denial—he has been handed down to an heroic immortality, an illustration of leal-hearted obedience, an example of triumphant faith, enduring to the very end of time. We should have predicated the obedience of Abraham from the uniform religiousness of his character, which we discover at every step of his life. There seems to have been an eminent devoutness of spirit from the time of his earliest call. He lived and moved under a constant recognition of God's presence, and worship consecrated each successive emigration. In the tent which he pitched between Bethel and Hai—in the fertile Mamre plain—under the shadow of the grove of oaks which he had planted in Beersheba —there rose the smoke of his morning and evening sacrifice; and it was this habitual preparation of heart, which prompted the ready allegiance and the answer both of the lip and of the life. But in the text the obedience is said explicitly to have resulted from the operation of faith: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son." If you analyze this faith, you will find, perhaps, that it had respect both to the past and to the future—to the inviolable word, and to the glorious destiny. It was an absolute reliance upon the promise of God. The text mentions it as enhancing the difficulties and the triumph of his faith: "He that had received the promise offered up" the one in whom alone could that promise be fulfilled. It would be impossible for the

patriarch to separate in his mind between the present command, however astounding, and all that long past loving-kindness which had so often made him glad. Reason would have arguments on this side, as well as on the other; and when the first bewilderment of astonished sorrow had passed away, and the healthy balance of the mind became restored, she would very diligently ply them. She would remind him of the many kindnesses and many covenants of which he had been the honoured partaker, and she would argue that God could not change his character; that though the cloud was dark—too dark for him to penetrate—there was the excellent glory behind it; that Jehovah might often be mysterious, but could never be unkind. She would remind him of the circumstances under which the child of promise was given; that his birth was in some sort a miracle; and she would then appeal to his own firm faith in the resurrection, and ask whether he, who brought him from the dead, could not also recall him from the dead; and she would picture, perhaps, the united household clinging in yet closer fondness after the second recovery—the obedience perfect, and yet the son restored. She would ask him, who had so frequently trusted God with all, to trust him once again; to believe that the same God, who had framed a purpose in wisdom, would subordinate all things to the achievement of his own design, and would take charge of his servant's reputation, so that it would be beyond the range of slander, or be unwounded by its venom. And then faith, which had been prompting reason all the while, would take the matter into her own hands, and would unveil before

him the whole boundless future — the day, whose morning streak, then dimly seen, brought youth into his withered limbs again, and caused the rejoicing blood to rush leaping into a full tide of life within him — when *his Seed*, the Divine-human Saviour, should bless all the nations with a fulness of light and of heaven. She might remind him that his offering might have some subtle connection with, as it was broadly typical of, that great expedient of mercy; that his obedience might be the grandest teacher of that redemption to mankind; and that God was not exacting from him a sacrifice greater than his own almighty love had made, for *He* spared not his own, his only-begotten Son, but had then in purpose, and would afterwards in fact, freely deliver him up to die.

This was the threefold argument in the sustentation of Abraham's faith. There was faith in an assured promise, faith in an opened sepulchre, faith in an incarnate Saviour; and by this faith, when he was tried, Abraham offered up Isaac. And it is the same principle, brethren, we need hardly apprise you, which must be our own shield and riches in the Christian life, which must sustain us under the pressure of multiplied sadness, and which must animate us to the discharge of self-denying duty. If faith must rest upon an antecedent revelation, surely ours, than Abraham's, is more clear and full. It is impossible for God to stamp his loving-kindness upon more precious promises, or to vindicate his fidelity by examples of more convincing power. The duty of faith, therefore, binding upon Abraham, who served

God in the morning twilight of his dispensation, is surely incumbent upon us who behold the noon, and to whom "the Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in his wings."

Brethren, the great hindrance both to our zeal and to our happiness is the weakness of our faith. We are languid, because we do not trust; murmuring, because we do not trust; paralyzed, or feeble in our effort, because we do not trust. Faith is like cheerfulness—a happy disguiser, and a continual feast; it hath a winsome ingenuity to find comfort in unexpected places, and to draw a prevailing argument out of the heart of a repulse. Thus David's faith craves forgiveness because of the enormity of his sin: "Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." Thus the Syrophenician woman: "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Thus the long infirm, pressing her perilous way through the crowd upon the skirts of the Teacher: "I shall never hear his tones, nor catch his eye, but I may press to the hem of his garment." Faith is like fire—a bright alchemist, that transmutes all things into its own spirit; and when it exerts its power, crosses and troubles become doxologies, even as unsightly faggots and coal ascend in glorious flame.

My hearers, have you faith to-day? It will be a grand and abiding result of blessing, if you take with you from the sanctuary a renewal of your faith in Christ. Your circumstances may be various, but faith is a heritage for ever. Oh, that I could steal into the heart of the contrite, of the perplexed, of the mourner, of the bereaved, of the dying, with the same message

of consolation from on high! Abraham has baptized this mountain—this mountain of Moriah—and its name is a perpetual blessing. Oh, listen to its unbreathed and comfortable message: "The Lord will provide!" What terrible trouble, what anguish, felt or feared, can escape from the soothing of these precious words? Is the barb of mortal sickness in the flesh? does Death flap his wings over thee, and beckon thee to his presence with all a lover's eagerness? "The Lord will provide" thee, if thou wilt but trust him, with songs on the threshold, and light in the valley, strength in the swellings of Jordan, and safe lodging in the mansions of the Father's house. Has the enemy passed by thee, but struck thy dearling, and wounded thee keenly through another's grave? Has he silenced the voice which thrilled thee ever when it spake, and stilled the heart which was a twin with thine? "The Lord will provide thee" with the relief of tears, and the slow comforts of the healer Time, and the satisfaction of a present faith, and the immortal hopes of a union where love cannot die. Art thou perplexed about duty, or about destiny, whether thou shouldst do this or that, whether thou shouldst go hither or thither? dost thou listen for a mighty voice, or a constraining word? Does care corrode thee, or the future trouble thee, or thy family, or thy business, lay heavy taxes upon thy solicitude? "The Lord will provide," if your faith will but rely. You enlist the power you trust; and, with reliance in your heart, "all the attributes Divine are now at work" for you. Are you anxious about God's cause, a disconsolate and fretting Elijah? He

can show you seven thousand, any time, that have never bowed the knee to Baal. Do you pray for a revival? Why not trust for it? Surely there is no monopoly of the Holy Ghost! He hangs upon no privileged lips, nor dwells in either Gerizim or Jerusalem, as an exclusive shrine. If the people were willing, it would soon be the day of God's power. If all of us had faith, there might be a Pentecost here, and now. Are you personally contrite, mourning in Zion, which ought to echo only with the jubilates of the ransomed? but you go softly and are mute from music, because you have not found Jesus.

My brother, "the Lord will provide," nay, he *has* provided already: Christ has died, and *lives*, to die no more, high on his Father's throne, but from that throne he stoops down to thee, thou poor, broken-hearted penitent, and says—don't you hear him?—"Be not afraid, only believe."

XVIII.

THE HOLY GHOST AND POWER.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me."—ACTS i. 8.

REMARKABLE and impressive words! more remarkable and impressive, inasmuch as they were uttered at the last conversation which the Saviour held with his disciples before his ascension into heaven. Their minds were by this time satisfied as to the reality of his resurrection from the dead. The many "infallible proofs" had overcome their scepticism, and had "declared him," even in their minds, "to be the Son of God with power." In the third verse of the chapter, St. Luke tells us that he had "spoken to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;" and they, blinded by the common and essential error of the Jewish people, from whose carnal perceptions they were never entirely relieved until the plenitude of the Spirit came down, persisted in ascribing to him the emblems of monarchical royalty and the government of an earthly kingdom; and, under the influence of this idea, they ask the question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He, rebuking their unhallowed inquisitiveness, and trying to recall their

vagrant thoughts to their sphere of practical duty, answers, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." "Mind not" the "high things" of my Father's council-chamber. Seek not with presumptuous hand to lift the drapery of that curtain, behind which he veils his plans. Go to your assigned labour—perform piously your allotted duty —"Ye are to be *witnesses* unto me;" and to fit you for a work at once so difficult and so honourable, "ye shall receive *power* when the Holy Ghost shall come upon you." In the contemplation of this interesting portion of Holy Writ, our thoughts are directed to—

I. *The Being who is to be manifested.*
II. *The Results.*
III. *The Design of his Manifestation.*

I. The reference you understand to be to that glorious Being, who is frequently presented to our notice in the Scripture as possessing all the attributes of Deity, distinct from, and yet united with, the Father and the Son, and to whom, in the economy of mercy, is assigned a supremely important agency in the redemption of mankind. We fear we have not dwelt sufficiently in our public ministrations upon the work and offices of the Spirit; and we remember that, even amid the exuberance of privilege that abounded in apostolic times, when the young Church boasted the guidance of those master spirits, who followed her Lord's footsteps and caught his glory, there were those who could say: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Without

imputing such ignorance to you, it may be needful to remind you of his position and claims, lest even in thought you should derogate from his rightful authority, and withhold from him the homage which is so justly his due. That the Spirit is God is matter of plain and explicit revelation. We learn from the same sacred record that his Divinity is underived and eternal, and that though in mediatorial office he exists in continual procession from the Father and the Son, he is inherently equal to both in wisdom, power, and glory. We are bound, then, to repudiate utterly the Arian and Sabellian heresies, and to believe devoutly that, not an emanation, but an essence—not an outstreaming influence, but an active person—he lives and reigns on high; and to the proud-hearted infidels, who deny his Divinity and blaspheme and insult his honour, we may, in the highest sense, use the withering thunder peal of language which was rolled upon a devoted sinner by the apostle of old—"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

It is the Spirit, thus Divine, to whom belongs exclusively the induction of men into the work and office of the ministry; and however arrogant their pretensions, however high to their own satisfaction they can clearly trace their genealogy, they are blasphemous intruders into the sacred office, if the call of the Spirit have not been given them, and if the unction of the Holy Ghost attest not the validity of their orders. No amount of classical erudition, no attainments of varied scholarship, no advantages of academical training, can compensate for the lack of this. Research

—before whose eagle eye the deep mysteries of Nature's treasure-house become "revealed things"—knowledge, to grasp—judgment, to analyze—capacity, to combine them—fancy, that can mould all shapes in earth or heaven into her images of beauty and of power—eloquence, whose lightning-thoughts are winged with words of thunder—affection, whose earnest eye and troubled brow speak more impressively than language — all these are nothing; useless and cumbersome hindrances, unless the Spirit breathe upon each and give it its energizing power — like flowers in the chamber of affliction, whose perfumes do but sicken the patient and aggravate the deadliness of his disorder; or like the escutcheon in front of the palace, glittering with gay colours and gorgeous in all the glory of heraldic emblazonment, and yet, after all, the token and memorial of death. And as the Holy Spirit is the originating power by which the ministry obtains its vitality, so *his* is the perpetuating grace by which that ministry is crowned with success. It is remarkable how uniformly the prophetical writers associate the bestowment of spiritual blessing exclusively with the influences of the Holy Ghost. Is it said that "Messiah's kingdom shall be established in truth and righteousness"? it is said also, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Are "men to grow as plants and as willows by the water-courses"? Shall one say, "I am the Lord's; and another subscribe with his hand unto the Lord," and name himself by the name of our God? It is because God will pour down his blessing upon their seed, and his Spirit upon their offspring. Is the

stately temple of the living God to be reared? and the "top-stone to be brought on with shoutings of Grace, Grace unto it"? "It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Is there in the "congregation of the dead," which for ages has slumbered in the valley of Vision, the stirring and heaving of a fresher life? It is because the "Spirit has come from the four winds and breathed upon the slain that they might live." It is he alone that "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." There is not a grievance to be redressed, not a hope to be inspired, not a blessing to be conferred, but by him. No ray of light will stream upon the darkened understanding, unless it radiate from him; no "comfortable word and kind" will be inspoken to the conscience, unless it come through him; no amount of pardon and of holiness will be drafted from above, unless the affluent storehouses of blessing are unlocked and opened by him. Without him, obstacles will remain undiminished, difficulties of colossal stature and revolting aspect will beset our path, frowning utter hopelessness upon the most industrious effort of man. Without him, God will always be dishonoured; man will always be accursed; the foul slime of the serpent will still pollute and desecrate the universe, and the great adversary of the human race will maintain his undisputed authority to scathe and to destroy. In all our endeavours, whether for our own advancement or the welfare and benefit of others, we must ever remember, it is he that must perform the work, and it is he that must receive the glory; and at every step of our track, we must be at once awed into

dependence and attracted into faith by the reverberations of the heavenly voice—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

II. As the natural result of the manifestation of a Being, thus Divine, they who are the recipients of his influence come into possession of power: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." God is the one source of power. In him only it inheres, and from him only can it be communicated to his creatures. He is Almighty, and the name betrays the secret of his power. The Psalmist, abashed before the grandeur of its displays, records his impression of it as the utterance of a double revelation: "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." The power of God is the earliest of his attributes, which impresses the human mind. It is impossible to send the thought out into the universe, without being conscious of power —an attribute ever present, lurking in its minutest, exhibited in its mightiest, phenomena. The objects which are the most familiar to us, the sun which lights us, the sky which arches over us, the atmosphere which wraps us round, the earth on which we tread, are all connected with the idea and suggestive of the mightiness of power. Who can mark the sweep of seasons and the pomp of planets—who ever gazed upon the monarch hills, or revelled amid the flowering mysteries of spring, or from the tall cliff that beetled over the marge saw, with a strange pride, beneath him, grand ocean rolling in upon the shore, without receiving into the mind those impressions of the vast,

the energetic, the influential, which lead up to the great thought of power — Power central, designing, intelligent, supreme? And as of all attributes men are the earliest impressed with power, so of all the attributes men are the most keenly covetous of power. That old classic fable of Prometheus, who made the shapely figure according to the beauty of a man, and then animated it by fire which he dared to steal from heaven, is but the thinly-veiled record of man's fierce ambition to create. In all ages, there have been men whose long lifetime has been a strife to encroach upon this prerogative of the Divine. Cunning at commoner masonry, they would pile up their Babel to the skies. Shrewd and skilled among their fellows, they became Herods that would ape the God. And when the work of creation was reluctantly conceded to be beyond their province, how eager has been the toil after the hidden secrets with which God has peopled creation—that Man, the master, might say to the elements, "Ye are my vassals; work for me, ye twin oceans of the water and the air, each the other's complement in your allotted ministry—thou earth, with thy various treasure-caves, pour thy riches at my feet — thou bright slave of fire, employ for me the subtle forces which I have discovered and subdued." If from the world of nature you pass into the world of mind, you find the same covetousness, perhaps the most dominant of the passions. If Pleasure has sung her invitations, and thousands have listened to the siren—if thousands more have bowed obsequious before Mammon, least erect among the fallen—power has been the end in many cases, for which both the *roué* and the gold-seeker

have toiled. Control, persuasion, influence—how has the ambition been an all-pervading one—from the masterful schoolboy or the child, dictator of the nursery, to the statesman on the topmost ladder or the monarch of a hundred isles! As the apostles were men of like passions with ourselves, we may conceive them to have been under the influence of this common human desire. That they were not free from ambition we can gather from incidental occurrences in their history. Thus there was an effort to reserve the seats on either side of the Redeemer in his kingdom for the aspiring sons of Zebedee; and the dispute arose who should be the greatest, while yet they had not the most darkling glimpse of the nature of the royalty, whose uninstructed heirs they were to be. The veil of carnal prepossession, through which their Hebrew spirits looked upon the purpose of the Saviour, was even now but very partially withdrawn, for there were traditions, at any rate, of the ancient error in their question—"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" They were no exceptions to the common ambition of humanity, and were penetrated with that longing for supremacy, which distinguishes with a strange perversity all of us brethren of the clay.

Now this love of power is an instinct, and as such not wholly criminal. God, who implanted it in human breasts, had some wise purpose in view. As in his physical creation, so in the realms of sentient and noble intelligence, he annihilates nothing, while he transforms and reproduces all. When the great work of conversion takes place in a sinner's heart, no passion is destroyed, no human feeling or faculty lost.

He is thrilled with a new affection, which directs into other channels each energy and emotion of his soul. Hence the Saviour answers the aspiration of his followers, while he rebukes their unhallowed curiosity, and assures them that they shall receive power, though he connects its bestowment with the descent of the Holy Ghost. You can conceive their feelings when they heard the promise given—how, in alternate swell, their breasts would fill with exultation and with wonder. Surely they would triumph and marvel together. "He said it"—as if their lips exclaimed, "He said it — the power we have coveted shall be ours; men will no longer dare to flout us; we shall bear the brand no longer as the Nazarene's insulted followers; haughty priest and lordly Roman shall be our vassals then; the people who deride us now will cheer their patriot rulers when the new dominion comes." "But," another might reply, "heard ye what he said about the Holy Ghost — what might that mean? Surely there lurks some strange mystery beneath his words; we thought *he* was to rout the cohorts, and banish the puppet governor, and make our trampled land a nation, and that we should march beneath his leadership to victory, and sit beneath his banners in freedom. Why did he rebuke us when we wanted to know the time? With what power will he endow us? I fear me, we are yet far from the understanding of the marvel and grandeur of his plans." Oh, often in the loneliness of those waiting days, when the sorrow of the bereavement was the deeper because its design was so darkly understood, would these questions perplex and baffle the disciples'

minds — riddles which they fain would guess, but could not, until God became his own interpreter— problems, of which the magnificent solution came only in the baptism of fire. The Pentecost scattered the shadows, and opened their eyes to the real wealth of the heritage in whose possession they became mighty to prevail. Then they saw how infinitely superior to all royalties, which baubles and trappings emblem, was the kingdom which they were to establish; how much grander the inner than the outer monarchy; how much diviner the spiritual than the national freedom. Then was unfolded to them that it was not theirs to be the heralds of revolution, to overturn a reigning dynasty, to flaunt in charioted-triumph after a sanguinary struggle —these were efforts and victories that might be left to meaner men—but that theirs was the higher glory of being instrumental in transforming hearts, in dethroning usurping passion, in restoring the supremacy of conscience, in bringing to their forgotten fealty nations of rebellious mind. Conscious of the spirituality of their commission, and clothed with power to discharge it, they went forth to the conquest of the world.

Brethren, the same gift of power is in reversion for the Church to-day — coming from the same Divine source, charged with the same spiritual character, inseparably connected with the same gifts of the Holy Ghost. The power of a living Christianity is not, cannot be, of earthly elements composed. Lawfully, indeed, may the earth help the woman; and it is one of the glowing portents of millennial day when kings are nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers, to the Church. But the hour when she culminated to

empire was the hour of her commencing feebleness; as if, like Herod, she had been smitten with a chronic malady in the very midst of the orations of her pride. In all kindly courtesy she may lean upon the arm of flesh; but when she relies upon its help, she finds it but a crutch, which makes her halting in her progress; and too often a reed, the which, when it is leaned upon, enters into her hand and pierces it. Her power then is not of armies, nor of patronage, nor of alliances, but of the Spirit of God. That can only be a spiritual influence which can win a heart—naturally alien—to the cordialities of faith, and which can throne a system of truth; which allows neither licence nor compromise in the cheerful hearts of those whom it formerly condemned. All that is courtly and all that is cruel would fail of results like these. Flattery might cajole into acquiescence, and persecution frighten into conformity, but the assent would languish when the voice of the siren ceased; and beneath the constraint, which the dread of cruelty had exacted, the rebel heart would fret and exasperate within. But when the power from on high comes down, conversion is an easy thing. The churl becomes bountiful, and the stubborn an example of humility; the rocky heart is broken, and the great mountain crumbles to a plain. And so the power by which men spread the truth consists not in eloquence or scholarship; not in personal energy, nor in the daring of excited heroism; but in that marvellous unction, which, as a Divine accompaniment, attends every development of the Christian's character, and waits upon every utterance of the preacher's lips. Look at the men who have been the most successful

exponents of the Gospel's inner power. That believer in apostate Sardis, who has not defiled his garments; or in languid Ephesus, who preserves the ardour of his first espousals; or in cold Laodicea, whose energy cuts like a sabre through dead forms and living lies—he was in no wise remarkable for native superiority of endowment; he was an average man, neither worse nor better than the world around him, till he went into the upper room and there sat upon him the cloven flame. That missionary of the cross, bold in his rebuke of idolatry, witnessing in fearless bravery against sceptred error, speaking of mercy by cannibal ovens and amid Dahomey "customs," lifting up the cross amid the glaring eyes and lifted clubs of savages, or rebuking the Brahman's sophistry or the Mollah's scorn by the calm earnestness of simple truth—there were scholars in the village school where he was educated, who vaunted of superior learning, and there were lads upon the village green who more than half believed him to be a coward. It was the foolishness of God that made him wiser, and the weakness of God that made him stronger than other men. That brave martyr, who blenched not from the headsman's axe, or who went up from the stake amid smoke and scornful laughter, as in a chariot of fire; there was a time when the aspen was not more sensitive to fear, and when he shrank appalled from physical discomfort and danger. It was the indwelling of the Holy Ghost that embraved his natural sensibility, and steadied his quivering nerves, and gifted him with a soul of power. Oh, for this gift of power upon ourselves. Without it, the most perfect organization is valueless, and the

most exquisite appliances cannot profit. With it, the stammerer shall be eloquent as Apollos, and the stripling Israelite shall be mighty as the angel of the Lord. Rest not, brethren, without its bestowment upon yourselves. Wait, as the apostles did, in active beneficence and fervent prayer, and the patient discharge of every-day duty, till it comes. Then, whether as the rushing wind or as the still small voice, whether in closet privacy or in sanctuary fulness, whether uplifting to ecstasy or entrancing the spirit into the awe of the silent heaven—your hearts, welcoming the gift, shall swell forth at once their hosanna and their resolve—"He hath made me full of joy by his countenance;" "Now will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

III. The great purpose for which this gift of power is bestowed, is that the Church may testify to the world, amid which it is for that purpose set. The power, thus divinely given, must be used for Divine ends. It is not to be a spendthrift faculty, the hoard of a miserly heart; nor an arrogant imperiousness, the vaunt of a self-sufficient one. It is to be the trust of a heart which reverently confesses its stewardship, and which balances the consciousness of power by the consciousness of responsibility, increasing in co-ordinate measure. We may lay it down as an axiom, which no sophist will dispute, that wherever there is power, there is use and mission for that power. God imprisons no force in aimless and eternal bondage. Power flashes in the lightning, but it is not to dazzle, but to purify. The viewless air is not the chartered libertine

that poets call it; all its power is for use and healing. The power of the dashing breaker, of the courier cloud, of the sun—that condescending monarch, who kisses the dew from the thatch or from the flower-cup, as tenderly as from columns argentine or golden dome—are not selfish or eccentric displays. These are loyal servants, all of them, in a vast and splendid palace, in which the Lord of the universe has lodged his favourite creature, man. And so in the realm of intellect, or in the nobler realm of morals, God bestows no gifts to be hoarded, nor despised, nor abused. Every endowment of mind—the athletic reason, the lordly will, the creative fancy, the eloquent utterance; every communication of grace, the high attainment, the cherished privilege, the winning influence, the precious, lingering, embalmed memory—all are from God, conferred upon the individuals who possess them, not for themselves merely, but for all men; and constituting important items in the record, by which they will be ultimately judged. Hence the apostles were clothed with power that they might be witnesses of their Master's death and resurrection, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"—first in the city where the marvels had been done, then in the country of which it was the metropolis, then in the border-lands around, and then far as the foot of man had trodden, that wherever the curse had banned, the redemption might bless mankind "to the uttermost part of the earth." This was the purpose of God in their endowment with power; and what else would have enabled them to fulfil so arduous a mission?

Poor, unlettered, save in the Spirit's lore and in the knowledge of human hearts, rude of tongue and guileless of the art and address by which the accomplished wind their way to triumph, what chance had they against the barbarism of boors and the sophistry of schoolmen, save in this influence, strange, omnipotent, Divine? And they did triumph more gloriously than ever warriors triumphed yet; for ere the last of them fell asleep beneath the purple sky of Ephesus, flourishing churches had risen up in almost every direction; and each province of the Roman empire, and each proud Grecian city, and each isle of the fair Ægean, had heard of the story of the cross, and felt its healing power.

Brethren, for this same purpose God giveth power to His people still. Christ is not yet enthroned. "We see not yet all things put under him." The witness must be borne now, permanent and clear as in apostolic times. There needs be no change in the matter of the testimony. Christ crucified, and risen, and "exalted as a prince and a Saviour," can charm the world of the nineteenth, as the world of the first, century; and though scoffers deride, and cowards hesitate, and traitors ignore and betray, this is the only witness which the Holy Ghost attests with power. Where art thou, believer in Jesus?—thou art called to be a witness for thy Master. This calling has been upon thee long. How hast thou fulfilled it? Oh, how solemn the thought! that some of us have been silent, and some of us have faltered, and some of us, perhaps, have borne false witness—perjurers in his name, who cannot lie. To us belong "shame and

confusion, but to the Lord our God" — oh, blissful recollection! — "belong mercies and forgivenesses, although we have rebelled against him." Here at the mercy-seat let our recreancy be acknowedged and forgiven; and then, there in the life among the world's thinkers and doers—spite of the scoffing and the slander —let our voice be heard, faithful in rebuke, kindly in admonishing, courteous but fearless in our testimony: "I determine to know nothing among men but Christ, and Him crucified." "The truth as it is in Jesus"— ah! it is this that will yet subjugate the world; no other name will win it from its waywardness; at no other shrine will it bow the sinews of its pride. Imperial in the past, the ages have not yet dawned upon its loftiest triumphs. Time has a future only to unfold its Apocalypse. Eternity will teem with the grandeurs of its consummated plan. And to be witnesses in the testimony of this! Surely this were an employment that might wile a seraph from his brotherhood, and cause the brightest angel in the sky, if the commission were but given him, to blush in the rapture of the unwonted honour. But oh! the majesty of Divine condescension—the witnesses are not angels, but men. Such honour have all God's saints. Such honour may be yours and mine.

XIX.

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—ACTS vii. 59, 60.

THE period of the Redeemer's incarnate life was thirty-three years. The period of his public ministry was limited to the last three years of his earthly sojourn. In that brief space of time all his marvellous works, all his elaborate discourses, and all his familiar ones—and, moreover, the grand scenes of his Passion—were crowded; and he accomplished all that was necessary, both in his own personal suffering, and in the preparation of his apostles for their work of progress and of power. The length of a life is not to be estimated by the winters over which it has spread. Some lives are brief at seventy, for their record is a blank and dreary vacancy; others are protracted at twenty-five, for a history has been compressed within the space.

"Men live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial."

After the Saviour's ascension into heaven, and the Pentecostal baptism, with its first result of the exten-

sive, and simultaneous, and sudden conversion of the three thousand, the apostles preached with all boldness and success—not deterred by the fetters or the council —until Jerusalem was filled with the doctrine, and the thoughtful among the adherents to the ancient faith "doubted among themselves whereunto this thing would grow." Thus far they had fulfilled their Master's commission, which had bound them to "begin at Jerusalem" in the proclamation of their message of joy. But there were broader purposes in the Redeemer's heart, than the moral conquest of Jerusalem could satisfy. His Gospel had a world-wide adaptation. In the covenant of which His death was the seal, he had stipulated for the ransom of a world. It was necessary, therefore, that the truth should not be locked up in the favoured city, to the exclusion of the parts adjacent; or the "all nations" and "the uttermost parts of the earth," which were equally in the command, would remain destitute of the tidings of blessing. But there was danger lest in the growing success and influence of the Church at Jerusalem, the outside world should be forgotten—lest the disciples should fail to remember that their mission was not one of testimony, but of evangelism — lest Peter and his fellows should re-enact his own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration; and as they rejoiced in the power of the Gospel, and gazed upon the converts, ripening into the warmth of a brave and generous piety, they should say: "Let us build us tabernacles here." God had therefore to provide against this danger, and He seems to have done it by withdrawing for a season the restraint in which He had held the

opposition of the carnal mind. Persecution was let loose against the faithful—the clamour silenced the confessor's testimony; believers were baptized into the fellowship of their Master's sufferings; some were imprisoned, and others were banished; but the imprisoned rejoiced in their bondage; and the banished, enforced but earnest missionaries of the Cross, went everywhere, preaching the word. The Church, moreover, was not complete yet. It had not all its orders of honour. It had apostles and evangelists, loyal believers and fearless confessors; but upon its bead-roll of martyrdom no names were yet inscribed. This reproach, however, was to be speedily wiped away. There, in the person of that deacon of the Church, a wise administrator, a skilful disputant—of ardent faith and spotless purity—full of the Holy Ghost, the earliest martyr stands; the first of that noble army, who in all ages have "resisted unto blood," and whom righteous Heaven and regenerate Earth alike conspire to honour, as the "foremost in their Master's cause, followers of the dying God." "And they stoned Stephen."

This seems to have been by no adjudication even of prejudiced authority; there was an arraignment indeed before the council, but he was interrupted in the midst of his defence, and, without any pronounced sentence, done to death in an ebullition of popular fury. It is a tragic scene. Outside the city must the murder be accomplished; for such is the complicated deceitfulness of the human heart, that these superstitious assassins would have shrunk with horror from defiling their streets with blood; and when the murder was over, would have deemed it a sin of fearful magnitude to sit

down to banquet with unwashen hands. There in the midst of that infuriate crowd—hounded among them to his doom—you see him stand, with that angel-face upon which the new beauty was already blushing—heavenlier even since he stood before the council, because he was nearer the glory which had tinted it—the crowd full of their fiendish purpose, and the witnesses malignant in their subornation of perjury. As the stones fall thickly upon his bruised body, he sinks down upon his knees—how else should the first martyr die?—and inheriting the spirit, as well as the suffering, of the Master whom he loved, his last breath is a prayer for his murderers: "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge"—and then it is finished. There, on the ground, is a battered casket, from which the jewel has escaped away—a ruined house of clay, out of which the *man*, undying, has arisen—and round it, when the passionate slayers have departed, and the last curious spectator has gazed upon the corpse and gone, come ministering angels hovering, who chant over it the soft requiem of their adoring gladness, "So He giveth His beloved sleep." In our meditations upon this passage, we do not purpose to submit the subject to any process of formal and logical division—we would rather, even at the cost of artistic unity, come to it with our hearts open, as learners seeking instruction and comfort, and take its suggestions as they successively arise.

I. We are moved, first, *To inquire into the secret of all this meekness and bravery.*

How came Stephen to be thus self-possessed before

the frowning Sanhedrim—fearless before an excited multitude in his home-thrusts of truth, brave in the crisis of trial, forgiving at the moment of death? Men are not born thus. As we mentally put ourselves into his circumstances, and try to realize each rapidly succeeding danger, our hearts fail within us, and we feel that no physical courage, nor hardihood of mere natural bravery, could sustain us here. There must have come some supernatural change upon him, to have induced at once this undaunted fortitude and this superhuman tenderness of love. Was it a miraculous bestowment, limited in its conferment to the first ages, and to some specially selected and specially missioned men? or is it within the reach and enjoyment of believers in Jesus now? These are questions which are interesting to us, as we dwell upon the developments of holy character presented in the life of Stephen.

Brethren, the secret of all the heroism and of all the loveliness is in the delineation of the man. "He was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." He did not leap into this perfect balance of character in a moment—springing at once full-armed, as Minerva is fabled to have sprung from the brain of Jupiter. There was no mystic charm by which the graces clustered round him; he had no mystery of soul-growth — no patented elixir of immortal ripening which was denied to others less favoured. He had faith; it was the gift of God to him, just as it is the gift of God for us. He had the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; which has been purchased for us in like manner by the blood-shedding of our Surety. The only difference between ourselves and him is that he

claimed the blessings with a holier boldness, and lived habitually in the nearer communion with God. There is no bar to our own entrance into this fulness of privilege; the treasury is not exhausted; the Benefactor is not less willing to bestow. His ear listens to any prayer for the increase of faith. He waits to shed forth the richer baptisms of the Holy Ghost upon all those who ask him for the boon. It is not then in physical endowment that we are to find the source of this moral courage. Some of the men who could lead the van of armies in the field—who could fix the scaling-ladder against the parapet and be the first to scale the wall—who could climb the rugged slope that was swept by the bristling cannon—have displayed the utterest cowardice when a moral duty has been difficult, when some untoward disaster has surprised them, or when they have had to maintain the right against the laugh of the scorner. Sometimes, indeed, those who have been physically timid, and who have shuddered sensitively at the first imagined danger, have been uplifted into the bravery of confessorship when the agonizing trial came. It is related that in the Duke of Wellington's campaigns, two officers were once despatched upon a service of considerable danger. As they were riding together, the one observed the other to be greatly agitated, with blanched cheek and quivering lip, and limbs shaken as with a paralysis of mortal fear. Reining his steed upon his haunches, he haughtily addressed him, "Why, you are afraid." "I am," was the reply; "and if you were half as much afraid as I am, you would relinquish the duty altogether." Without wasting another word upon his

ignoble companion, the officer galloped back to headquarters, and complained bitterly that he had been ordered to march in the companionship of a coward. "Off, sir, to your duty," was the commander's sharp reply, "or the coward will have done the business before you get there." And the great duke was right. There was physical timidity, perhaps the result of a highly-wrought nervous organization — for the nobler the heart, often the tenderer are the fibres—but there was an imperial regard to duty which bore him above his fears to triumph. And the annals of God's Church can furnish many such instances, in which the most susceptible and shrinking natures have displayed the sturdiest resistance to oppression, and the most confiding faith in God. The Church's martyrology has many a touching story of the sufferings endured for Christ's sake by delicate and high-born womanhood—how those, who in the ancestral home have been so fondly screened from ill that the air of heaven itself might not visit them too roughly, have stood in the times of persecution as the stately cedar in the storm; and how even childhood has anticipated its manliness: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." Yes, brethren, it is faith, not daring, which is the stuff of which martyrs are made; they are what they are from no stalwart muscle, or well-knit network of nerves, but from the indwelling demonstration of the Spirit and of power. You will be tried, all of you, if you have not been already.

There are times in every life, when "the clouds

pour out" the "water" which they have long been gathering, and "the skies send out" their mightiest thunderings of "sound." Do you want to meet bravely the hour and power of darkness? Are you wishful to maintain your integrity—to be so hardy in your virtue, that the temptation which bends you to the dust, and almost rends your heart in twain, shall not shake your principle a hair? Then let "the life which you now live in the flesh" be "by the faith of the Son of God." It is the daily drill which makes the battle hero. It is the breasting the stream full oft which makes the swimmer strong. It is the ordinary faith—the daily resting upon Jesus—the reliance which confides alike in the petty vexation and in the giant trouble—in the small seduction, and when the tempting enemy comes in as a flood—which alone can make us strong in the endurance of inevitable suffering, and heroic in the testimony given amid a tempest of slander. Be it ours, brethren, to ask at the footstool of mercy for this increase of faith to-day—and that our hearts, which have heretofore but glimpsed the Divine, may rejoice in His abiding presence, and become temples of indwelling God.

II. We gather, secondly, from the history of Stephen, *that the common lot of the Christian is an inheritance of persecution.* There would appear to have been nothing in his character to have stirred up a hostile feeling. He was reputed learned and honourable; his spirit was gentle and forgiving; and, as the Church's almoner, his office was benevolent and kind. But he was consistent, and his example shamed

the ungodly; he was faithful, and his rebuke stung his adversaries to the quick; he was unanswerable, and that was a crime too great to be forgiven. In a word, he was a Christian; and the carnal mind is in all ages and under all circumstances enmity against God.

The past history of the Church—what is it but a history of suffering? The prophets under the old dispensation, though they wielded an immense influence, and were kings without sceptres and palaces, were yet the marks for derision and insult; all of them were scoffed at, some of them were slain. Nearly all the primitive apostles wove the martyr's amaranth into their crowns of thorns. Pagan Rome vindicated, in ten general persecutions, her right to the attribute of cruelty; and in her cruel edicts, and infamous Dragonades, and solemn *Autos-da-fè*, and congenial Inquisition, Papal Rome has not been a whit behind her.

Nor does Rome enjoy a monopoly of persecution; it is a disgrace in which she has many fellows. There are many inexcusable instances among churches of a purer faith, in which persecution has been born of power, and in her delirium of newly-acquired influence has trampled upon the restraints of humanity, and not less upon the precepts of creed. But apart from all forms of ecclesiasticism, the world and the men of the world are at enmity—at stern and lasting enmity—with those that will live godly in Christ Jesus. It has been so in all ages; it is so still. The developments of the persecuting spirit will be modified by the advance of intelligence, by the decorums of social life, by the interlacings of interest, and not least by the

silent but influencing leaven of unrecognized Christian feeling. But if you are a Christian, a fearless, uncompromising Christian, depend upon it, at the heart the world hates you and your practice still. We hear not, of course, in our own country of the opposition of the strong hand—of prison, and faggot, and axe, and flame . . ugh Madiais in Tuscany and saints in Madagascar co.. attest that even these exist where there is power as well as malice—the lifted hands, as well as the gnashing teeth of rage. But there are various forms of persecution which lay not a finger on the body, though in a fiercer gripe they touch all that a man hath with sorrow. The father may interpose to restrain his child's devotion, or the husband may be authoritative in the denial of the wife's privileges, or the custom may be withdrawn, or the preferment withheld, or the suspicion insinuated, or a wing given to the slander, or the reputation may be damaged by the lie of speech or by the lie of silence. Oh, there are a thousand ways in which the latent hate can be shown. A glance of the eye, or a curl of the lip, or a shrug of the shoulder, or the deprecating hypocrisy which can lurk in a wave of the hand—all these in given circumstances may be the bitterest persecution; while a barbed adjective, an envious whisper, a dissembling smile may burn the soul with more scorching fires than the kindled pile can wrap around the body. If you have persecution to contend against—be thankful—be comforted—for it is one proof of your discipleship. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own." If your course is against the wind, that is the course of the thunder-cloud, in whose heart is the

living fire. If all is smooth with you, and you meet no breath of opposition, and all men speak well of you, reproach yourselves with some lurking infidelity, or with some shrinking from plain but unwelcome duty. You are the sort of prophet the world likes to consult; for you prophesy smooth things, and speak syllables prescient of success, and make the heart of the wicked ones comfortable with the glozing lie. Is it therefore that they do not persecute you, because you are not faithful with them, because you tolerate their errors, because there is so little difference between you that they mistake you for one of themselves? Oh, for the reputation of Micaiah, the son of Imlah, from whom the rebellious Ahab expected only evil tidings, and who could say in his incorruptible integrity, "As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak." That is the truest love which will in no wise suffer sin upon a neighbour, and which heals an inner festering by the infliction of a friend's faithful wounds. Brethren, persecution cannot harm us, but unfaithfulness may and will. Unfaithfulness will be to our souls as the deluge to the world—a flood to drown us in perdition. Persecution will be to us as the deluge to the ark—a flood to uplift us toward heaven.

III. We may gather as our third lesson from the subject, *that God's grace is most palpably present when we most sorely need it.*

In the earlier life of Stephen, before his entrance upon the offices of deacon and evangelist, we may be sure that, according to God's promise, daily grace had

been vouchsafed for daily work and trial; but with special and onerous duty came special replenishment and supply. In the gloom of the fierce council, the warmth of the love of God within him rayed out so brightly that it mantled his countenance, as the blush of morning mantles the sky; boldness of utterance was given to him, which his adversaries were not able to gainsay; he was strengthened to testify at the last both to the divinity of Jesus, to whom he commended his departing spirit, and to the all-conquering meekness which had shred out of his heart every particle of malice, and every desire for revenge. He had rare visions of the opening heaven, and of the Redeemer in whose arms his bleeding head should peacefully recline; and then, impatient to be gone, his spirit broke away from his baffled murderers, and he went triumphantly in. And thus may believers comfort themselves still under the pressure even of their heaviest trials. There is a watchful eye over them which provides for the fulfilment of the promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Have you not heard it from the lips of those who were once the combatants in the same fight as yourselves, but are now the crowned in the same heaven which you hope to attain—that the time of their most imminent peril was the time of their most glorious deliverance—and that upon the proud waters which threatened to engulf their dearest hopes, the Saviour whom they trusted marched in his might to save them? Have you not listened in the death-chamber of some departing saint, and wondered as they spake of visions of unearthly beauty, and of songs so sweet that no minstrelsy of

earth could vie with them—as though while the things of earth were being darkened by the films of dying, an invisible hand had unveiled the things of heaven, and had cleared the inner senses for the perception of the beauty and the song? Cold science calls such things the wandering of the intellect, or the phantasm of the brain that is fevered, and, for the time, insane.

But why should not God open heaven to his Stephens now? What could better sustain them in the parting agony? What nerve them with steadier and more trustful courage to battle with the pains of death and overcome the last pang of separation, and pass in victory home. We will not have the two worlds thus severed by an impassable gulf from each other's communion. We will not yield our faith at the bidding of a sceptical philosophy, nor have our glowing comforts frozen by contact with cold material laws. We believe that many a time and oft, when the Lord's people have lain upon the death-couch, unconscious apparently to mortal sight and sound, the spirit has travelled under God's own guidance to the summit of some spiritual Pisgah, and there the good land of the promised rest has been presented, fair and beauteous, to the view. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." You cannot fail to notice the remarkable vision which comforted the soul of Stephen—"I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." There is no parallel to this in the whole compass of the Book of God. Such a union of marvellous condescension and ineffable tenderness can be found nowhere beside. After his mediatorial work on earth was over—every-

thing completed into a perfection of plan which could be subject to no derangements, and which no combination of hostility could overthrow—"He sat down, expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." From this royal session and kingly expectancy no anxieties move him. "The heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers are gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ;" but he is not ruffled by a wrinkle of solicitude, nor by a shade of care. He sits—expecting. His people worship him, and on his throne he receives their homage. They pray for blessing, and he stretches out the sceptre graciously, and bids them touch, and live. They are troubled in the hands of their arch-enemy, and, still seated, he intercedes for them that their faith may not fail. But lo! the harpers hush their music, and there is silence in heaven—for the throne is vacant; and he, the Lord of heaven, *stands* in friendliest welcome—when, baptized with the fellowship of his own sufferings, the first brave martyr dies. Where art thou whose soul is in heaviness to-day, who art bewildered under the disquietude of thy trouble—art thou in Jesus? then his "grace is sufficient for thee," and it will come in the time of thy need. If trials are thy heritage, they will come when thou art able to bear them, and not till then. If the anguish of the present year is greater than the anguish of the past year, it is because the strength is greater too. The Refiner sits by the furnace and superintends the flame. It shall not scorch too fiercely; it shall not burn too long. Let thy tears be dried, and thy throbbing heart

be still. Thou hast trusted him, and thy trust shall not be dishonoured. Sooner than that, he will convulse earth's mightiest thrones and darken the earth itself, and uproot the everlasting hills, and shatter the pillars of heaven.

IV. We may learn, fourthly, *that death is no more death to a believer in Jesus.* "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." How absolute the triumph over the last enemy which these words express! When men court slumber, they banish from their hearts all causes of anxiety, and from their dwellings all tumult of sound; they demand quiet as a necessity; they exclude the light and draw the curtains close; they carefully put away from them all that will have a tendency to defeat, or to postpone the object after which they aim. But *he* fell asleep under very different circumstances to these. Brutal oaths, and frantic yells, and curses loud and deep, were the lullaby which sang him to his dreamless slumbers; and while all were agitated and tumultuous around him,

> "Meek as an infant to its mother's breast,
> So turned he, longing, for immortal rest."

The evident meaning of the words is that death came to him simply as a release from suffering—as a curse from which the sting was drawn—so mitigated in its bitterness, that it was as harmless and as refreshing as sleep. And this is by no means the only instance in which this comparison is made. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren," says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "concerning them which are asleep, that ye

sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," was the tender announcement of the Saviour to his disciples, when he told them of the shadow which had fallen upon the loved home at Bethany. "He fell asleep"—then he rested from labour and sorrow, for in sleep there are no sweat-beads on the peasant's brow, and the tear on the troubled cheek forbears to fall. "He fell asleep"—then there was security for the body in the grave, and for the spirit in the paradise of God. "He fell asleep"—then there was hope that on the night of the grave should stream the bright rays of an Easter, whose sun should never go down. Repose, safety, restoration—these are the ideas of comfort, which are couched in the expression of the text. Take them, and rejoice in the majestic hopes which they inspire. Christ hath died. He, dying, drew the sting from death; and, properly speaking, there has been no death of a believer since that day. What saith the Scripture? "He that believeth on Jesus, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall never die." What fulness of consolation to those who are mourning for others—to those who are dying themselves! With the banner of this hope in hand, the believer may return with a full heart from the grave of his best beloved, "giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," and may march calmly down to the meeting of his own mortal foe. Ye who grieve over the body's diseases and the spirit's sorrow—who mourn that the stroke of death should sunder those

loved companions — that the one should moulder amidst the grave's corruptions, and the other wend its solitary way into the dark unknown—grieve not so sorely; they shall meet again, and it shall be a happy bridal; and the soul, in dying, may well address the companion of its pilgrimage as the poet has imaged—

"Companion dear! the hour draws nigh—
The sentence speeds—to die, to die.
So long in mystic union held—
So close with strong embrace compelled—
How canst thou bear the dread decree
That strikes thy clasping nerves from me?

"That thou didst sometimes check my force—
Or trifling, stay my upward course—
Or lure from heaven my wavering trust—
Or bow my drooping soul to dust—
I blame thee not, the strife is done;
I knew thou wert the weaker one;
The vase of earth—the trembling clod—
Constrained to hold the breath of God.

"Well hast thou in my service wrought,
Thy brow hath mirrored forth my thought;
To wear my smile, thy lip hath glowed;
Thy tears, to speak my sorrows, flowed;
Thy hands my prompted deeds have done;
Thy feet upon mine errands run.
Yes, thou hast marked my bidding well—
Faithful and true—Farewell, farewell.

"Yet we shall meet—to soothe thy pain—
Remember, we shall meet again.
Quell with this hope the victor's sting,
And keep it as a signet ring.
Keep thou that hope to light thy gloom
Till the last trumpet rends the tomb.

"Then shalt thou glorious rise and fair,
Nor spot, nor stain, nor wrinkle bear;
While I, with hovering wing elate,
The bursting of thy bonds shall wait:
And breathe the welcome of the sky,
No more to part—no more to die."

XX.

THE FAITHFUL MINISTER.

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."—ACTS XX. 24.

THIS touching scene exemplifies the truth that bravery and tenderness can dwell in the same heart together. Who was more valiant than the apostle in the maintenance of the truth?—"in jeopardy every hour;" living familiarly with danger; in artless simplicity detailing a catalogue of sufferings worthy of the stoutest confessor's high renown; counting his life as amongst the all things which he was ready to sacrifice for Christ; actually offered up upon the service of his faith, and grasping from imperial hands the crown of martyrdom.

And yet here the man, who neither blenched from danger, nor quailed in the presence of agony, appears before us with eyes suffused with tears, with a heart subdued by the sensibilities of manly sorrow, and with strong affection going out after the people of his charge, whose hearts seem to clasp round his as the tendril round the supporting tree. It is a beautiful example of ministerial faithfulness and sympathy,

attracting to itself the responses of reverence and love. With a hero's calmness the apostle has set his face towards Jerusalem, zealous, in the great metropolis of Judaism, "to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

He is not ignorant of the hazards of his enterprise, for the Holy Ghost has witnessed to him that in every city bonds and afflictions await him; but he has a stedfast courage which no dangers can appal. For three years he has ministered in Ephesus, and, by God's blessing upon his word, has achieved there moral triumphs, marvellous both in magnitude and number; and he sends for the elders of the church which he had formed, and which was endeared to him by many ties; offered to them his last words of counsel, "commended them to God and to the word of his grace," and, parting from them with blessing on his lips, bade them a lasting farewell.

In the course of his address he sets before them, in the noble words of the text, the objects of his hero-life, the principles of his conduct, and the hope which, as an anchor of the soul, animated and sustained his endeavours: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

There is in these words—

I. *A declaration of an office.*

II. *A sense of dependence in the discharge of its duties.*

III. *Purposes of fidelity.*

I. The apostle declares expressly that he has received a ministry, that it came upon him by no human designation or appointment, but that he received it of the Lord Jesus, and that the burden of its duty was to "testify the gospel of the grace of God." His testimony as to the prime purpose of his ministry is explicit and unvarying.

He tells us in another place that "a dispensation of the gospel has been committed unto him." Contemplating the great results achieved, he breaks out again in wondering gladness: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" and, in vindication of his aim and of his labour, declares that "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum" he has "fully preached the gospel of Christ."

It is obvious, therefore, that the apostle regarded himself as sent with a glad evangel, and that any ministry in his judgment would have been inefficiently fulfilled which did not tell of reconciliation, which did not by its uniform presentation of the grace of God in Christ

> "Speak, and bid the lost be found,
> Speak, and bid the dying live."

This is absolutely necessary, if men would testify of the gospel of the grace of God.

To speak of moral duties, to discuss Divine attributes, to descant upon the comeliness of Christian virtues, to expound the deep mysteries of the boundless future—to dwell upon any or all of these *merely* to make them the staple subjects of a ministry—nay, to

present them in any other light than that which streams from the Cross—is not a testimony of the gospel. Not, of course, that they are to be excluded, nor deemed to be unimportant, by the Christian teacher. His preaching will be neither a dreamy mysticism, nor a bald Antinomianism. These and other subjects may help to devotion, they may be salutary in their influence upon the secularities of life, they may leaven the masses of society, they may dissipate somewhat the engrossing darkness of heathendom—but they are no testimony of the gospel. The world is beggared, and it craves for its forfeited heritage; rebel, and it sues earnestly for pardon; prodigal, and it sighs amidst its rags for the shelter and affection of its home; lost, and from its agonized heart there shrieks forth its longing for a Saviour.

The gospel, therefore, must be that which tells of salvation—the embodiment of those truths which make at one the offended and the offender—truths which are not local nor limited in their adaptedness, but around which the whole world gathers—which appeal universally to human sympathy, and fellowship, and consciousness, and which link mankind in a diviner brotherhood than that of country or of kindred.

This was the object which in the counsels of eternity occupied the mind of the Highest; for he foresaw the fall, and he devised the remedy. Redemption was no after-thought—no hasty expedient to gather the shattered fragments of a race, and re-unite them into something like harmony and order. There had been both foresight and provision. The Lamb

was slain in type and purpose from the foundation of the world. The great work of Heaven ever since the fall has been the salvation of man. For this the world has been kept in being; this is the substance of all revealed dispensation; and all the events, both of physical and moral government, have been moulded into a beautiful subordination to the accomplishment of this strange design.

What brought the Son of God from heaven? Why were the miraculous agencies of the Spirit granted, so that frail men could wing the lightning of heaven, and from the grim hand of Death himself could recover his recent prey? Why did the finger of Inspiration write the Bible, and the arm of Omnipotence defend it? Why were patriarchs instructed to rear their simple altars, and priests to offer their sacrifices, and prophets to kindle beneath their visions, and apostles to set forth upon their errands of love? Why do angels watch this world so tenderly? and if their eyes, in their ministering, light upon a penitent—be that penitent a pauper or a child—why does a sense of deeper joy tremble through their ranks, and stir them to higher ecstasies of praise? The one answer to all these inquiries is, that in heaven there is a purpose, and on earth a proclaiming, of salvation to ruined man. It is manifest, then, that if in any ministry there be a cold or a scanty declaration of redemption—if Christ and him crucified are not the theme and the glory—there is injury inflicted upon man, and there is dishonour done to the majesty of mercy on high.

And it is just this preaching of the Cross, which is the

best security for temporal as well as spiritual blessings —the safety of a nation, as well as the salvation of a man. This is proved abundantly by the universal history of mankind. Plant the Cross in the midst of *any* moral desert, and under its merciful shadow everything barbarous and cruel will wither, everything of good report and lovely will begin to germinate and ripen. Nothing so effectually as the gospel can scatter the darkness of ages, can break the spell of superstition's accursed enchantment, or can frown away the corruption and fraud and cruelty which nestle, like things of dust and shame, in all the false religions of mankind. It has spoken, and the chain of bondage, forged and fastened by a thousand links, has fallen from the fettered limb. Mind has heard its voice, and, like a bright beast springing from its lair, has leaped out into the day. Reason has emerged from its dwarfishness, and has assumed a magnificence of power. The temporal miseries of humanity have been incalculably diminished by its propagations; and under its reign, even where it has only been partially established, the world has found a rest which before it only poetry had fancied—a freedom, a greatness, a power, of which philosophy had dreamed in vain.

And with respect to spiritual blessings, it is obvious that these, as conferred by the preaching of the truth, are of immense and unpurchaseable value. It comes to man as ignorant—unable to retain God in his knowledge, harassed by a thousand false and bewildering speculations, and it teaches him of God, of himself in his responsibilities and destiny, and of that glorious or fearful future to which he rapidly tends. It comes

to man as guilty—liable to all the curses of the law which he has violated; and, turning him from cruel and fruitless endeavours after personal expiation, bids him no longer "sacrifice to gods which smite him," but to see upon the hill of Calvary the accepted propitiation; and as he looks upon the Saviour, to rejoice in the pardon, happiness, and love, which drop from his gracious eye. It comes to man as polluted—and it brings him the inner purification which no ceremonial cleansing can compass; and it works by the subduing and by the sanctifying agency of the Holy Spirit, until the man is holy unto the Lord, and his consecrated and spotless heart becomes a temple of indwelling God. It comes to man as miserable—racked with vexations and unhappy in sorrow, wandering through a joyless life with the cry ever on his lips, "Who will show us any good?" and it opens for him hidden treasures—peace that in its kingly serenity passeth all understanding—hope, like a triumphant rainbow, spanning the darkest cloud—joy unspeakable from the satisfaction of faith and from the present sense of favour—anticipation that is gladsome, and memory that is embalming—Divine fellowship and blessing now, and the heritage of the hundredfold amid the recompenses of the world that is to come. This is the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

And this is "the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." We preach that man is *guilty;* that he has fallen from his high estate, and become everywhere a sufferer and a sinner; that his moral nature has been injured, and that his beauty has been marred,

and his strength stricken by sin. He has faculties of rare and high endowment; but, like the broken columns of some ancient temple, they tell only in their ruin of the magnificence of yore, and but a dim memory, like a sad night-wind sighing through the crypt of the deserted fane, tells that there God once dwelt and manifested forth his glory. Man is guilty. In spite of the rapture of the transcendentalist, we are bold to proclaim it—man is guilty. You, every one of you, rich perhaps in wealth, or noble in character, read in the lore of books, or having in your veins the blood of the royal family of Genius—you, every one of you, are guilty before God—guilty by hereditary taint, guilty by personal offences; and it will be of grace, and not of debt, if you escape the perditions of hell.

We preach that man is *condemned.* Sin, as the violation of the law, necessarily exposes its perpetrators to penalty: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." "God hath concluded them all"—both Jews and Gentiles—"in unbelief." "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Are these the statements of the Bible? then the whole world of sinners, without exemption and without partiality, have the sentence of death within themselves. Yes! that reputable observer of propriety, that rigid and scrupulous moralist who "fasts twice in the week, and gives tithes of all that he possesses"—he is condemned. Yes! that fair and gentle

maiden, gentle as the summer breeze which fans her brow, the darling of the social circle, screened by parental tenderness lest the winds should visit her too roughly, her external character pure as the fresh flakes of snow—she is condemned. Yes! the child with that winsome look, for cherub's face too bright, as it smiles and nestles on its mother's knee—that child is "by nature a child of wrath, even as others." The curse has found out all; it has profaned every charity, and outraged every home; and, like a flying roll, with a strange speech of judgment, it has darkened the entire world with its intense and terrible shadow.

We preach that man is *helpless*—with prostrate strength and nerveless arm, unable to rise for his own deliverance, or to work out his own salvation. It stands an irrevocable axiom on the book of God, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." If it were possible for you at this moment—as it is—to close with the offers of mercy, and obtain both a new relationship and a new nature, you are still, by reason of your past transgressions, guilty before God. If it were possible—which it is not—that you should remain in your own strength spotless from your first sin to your last breath, that first sin has destroyed your purity, and brought upon you the feebleness of age.

Let it go forth—it is time it did, that Pride may be humbled by the announcement—There is no merit in man. No! not in the apostle, whose saintliness of consistent piety shames all ordinary men. No! not in the prophets, to whose seers' eye are unfolded in open vision the King in his beauty, and the radiant

elders round about his throne. No! not in the martyr, who wraps himself in his flame shroud, as in a chariot of fire. No! the most fervent prayer that mortal ever breathed, the holiest groan that was ever wrung from labouring sorrow, the purest tear that penitent ever shed, have so much of alloy and of imperfectness, that the Holiest charges them with folly; and they must, all of them, be sprinkled with the blood of atonement, ere they come up with acceptance upon the altar of the Lord.

We preach that man is *ransomed*—that there has been a great and accepted propitiation, and that salvation, free, and full, and perfect, is brought within the reach of every child of man. On this matter too, the testimony must be definite and clear. There is no bar of exclusion by which any human being need be deterred. No man will be lost because, by inevitable decree, he has been branded as a sinner from the womb. No man need pass his days in despondency and his nights in sorrow, because the thought has fastened on his spirit that he is a poor orphan of grace, or at best that he has only the loose and doubtful chance of uncovenanted mercy.

There is a provision for all, an invitation to all, a welcome for all. There is room in the heart of Christ and in the heaven of Christ for every one; and the great God himself, in infinite condescension, comes down to the dwellings of men—to the beggar's door, to the orphan's feet, to the lazar-house of foulest leprosy, to the donjon-keep of vilest and most sullen crime—and says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come

in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

We preach that man is *immortal*—that the grave is not the goal of being—that beyond it, solemn and strange, there are worlds of retribution—that those who believe are, through the merits of the Saviour, exalted into heaven, where "knowledge grows without decay, and love can never die"—and that those who continue impenitent, who reject the counsel of God against themselves, and who carry out of the world with them the burden of uncancelled sin, pass down into a heritage of wrath and sorrow, where "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

This is our testimony of the gospel; and in the presence of this congregation, who may gainsay me if I err, and in the presence of the great Jehovah, whom I have wished to serve in the gospel of his Son—I affirm in all humility, that "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

II. The apostle mentions two things as absolutely indispensable to the right fulfilment of this office—*humility* and *fidelity*—a sense of dependence upon God, and a fearlessness of utterance before man.

And surely there is enough to humble us, when we consider the importance of the work, and falter under the consciousness that its duties have been inefficiently discharged. There is, however, in human nature a very powerful tendency to self-exaltation. We must all feel it. It is part of the sad and sinful heritage entailed upon us by the fall; and it would fain accompany us even into the sanctuary, and

blemish the purity of all our services for God. But it will be far from us, if we reflect either upon our obligations or upon ourselves.

Two considerations seemed to influence the apostle, and may tend to promote this salutary state of feeling—

1. Because *necessity is laid upon us.*

It is impossible for a minister of Christ seriously to contemplate his high calling, with all the responsibilities which it involves, and with all the sanctions by which it is commended, without feeling his utter inadequacy for a position so solemn. He is under a positive command of heaven, which he is bound to obey, but obedience to which is rendered difficult by adverse influences. The love of Christ constrains him, but earthliness and evil prevent its full development within his soul. He is burdened with a sense of the necessities of men; he sees them wandering without hope, straining wistfully through the midnight in search of a guide and of a home. But while he yearns for their deliverance, he is helpless as a child; and, moreover, his own passions are strong, and a moral battle rages in his own heart the while.

It is no wonder that he should feel a dependence most utter and absolute; and while, as he dwells upon the worth of the soul and its danger, and the dread issues in which his ministry may terminate, his heart often sends forth its cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" He is consoled only by the response, divinely thundered from behind the cloud of fear, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

There is need for this humility, if we consider—

2. *That we have nothing which we have not received.*

We have not only received the ministry from the Lord Jesus, but also the qualifications to fulfil its duties. This thought should be impressed upon our minds continually—that all we have and all we are, are of Divine bestowment, and come to us directly from God's ever-bountiful hand. They who vaunt themselves of their own resources or acquirements, relapse, by the act of vanity, into practical atheism. They depose Jehovah from the supremacy of his own world.

Though we could "speak with the tongues of angels, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge"—though we had the strength of an intellect, which over all that is abstruse and difficult should tower in imperial mastery—though on the wings of clear and patient thought we could soar into regions of devout contemplation, not obscured by earth's passing shadow—though, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, our lightning-thoughts were winged with words of thunder—down in the dust before God, in no affectation of humility, but in the sober earnestness of realized conviction, we must say, "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

We are nothing—absolutely nothing—but "our sufficiency is of God."

III. In order to the due discharge of ministerial duty, there must also be unflinching *fidelity*.

How noble an example of this does the apostle afford us in the text, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry,

which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." On another occasion, impressed with the solemnity of his office and of the penalty if he abused or neglected it, he says, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." And the apprehension of this danger, and the dauntlessness of this courage, ought to be present with every minister of the Lord Jesus. If we depart from the gospel, or hide its essential truths, or are pliant to the prejudices and tolerant of the vices of those who hear us; if we fail to reprove spiritual wickedness because it thrones itself in high places, or cease, from indifference or treachery, to warn the wicked from his way; if we preach not the whole gospel, or preach anything but the gospel; we are traitors to our trust, and heritors of an inheritance of woe. We are foul intruders into the office of God's ambassadors, we criminally undertake that which we fail to perform, and we are largely chargeable with the guilt of blood.

Oh, stop and think of the weight of those terrible words — *the guilt of blood!* Who can bear it? To meet the glance of the Judge, which scathes the unfaithful witness into eternal shame—to hear the doom of banishment and sorrow spoken from lips that know not to recall their words—to listen to the reproachful wailings of those whom we have spared to warn, and who in companionship of penalty are to people the same hell as their betrayers—to perish in our treason and impiety, and to perish not alone—Oh, who can bear it? What heart does not shudder and

tremble? What lips are there that will cease from the impassioned prayer, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation"?

Can you wonder, brethren, that with this blended sense of dependence and of responsibility, the minister should be moved to fidelity, if haply he may finish his course and his ministry, in common joy, together? He dares not be unfaithful, if he rightly estimates his office, and realizes that he performs its duties under the felt inspection of Almighty God. To be faithful unto death is his highest ambition; to be faithful unto death is his perpetual prayer.

Brethren, for three years now you have listened to my voice testifying in the midst of you, with many shortcomings, but with an unfailing purpose of usefulness, the gospel of the grace of God. In the review there come, as in the haunted woodland, flitting memories of joy and sorrow. There are those amongst you who will never forget the sanctuary, for it has been to you the hall of banquet, the palace of the great King. Here you have had audience of his royalty; here you have partaken of his prepared and joyous feast. You were rebel and starveling when you entered it at first, you are reconciled and wealthy now. The gospel which has been preached here has been preached for a salvation unto you.

I have rejoiced over you with exceeding joy—a joy which has as little as may be of the taint of earthliness about it—and I long and labour for your steadfastness in the disinterested importunateness of prayer. Oh, if it be true, as the Scripture seemeth to teach us, that the minister's recompense is graduated somewhat

in its raptures by the spiritual progress of his hearers —if the crown of his rejoicing shines with brighter or with dimmer lustre as his people are earnest or indifferent—"look to yourselves," and to your purity, that we lose not the full reward.

But there is another preaching of the gospel, which the minister unconsciously fulfils. There is a fearfulness of meaning in a certain passage of the Word, which I pray that you may never know: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a *witness* unto all nations."

Whether you have heard me, then, or whether you have refused to hearken, I cannot labour in vain. If the word does not arrest, it accuses; it may bring no conviction, but it writes down a terrible chronicle; you may despise its salvation, you must listen to its witness.

The words of man's guilt and helplessness and ransom which you heard me speak to-day—they fell upon your ears perhaps listlessly, as of some ancient and oft-repeated tale—but they are not lost. They sprang forward in the utterance, and they wrote themselves in the book of God's remembrance. I cannot recall them, and you and I will both hear of them again. Simple words, spoken in a moment, they cannot die. They will go echoing on until the judgment. Memory will revert to them on that day. Retribution will avenge the neglect of them on that day. As an accusing voice which has gathered intensity from silence, they will speak on that day for a witness of the abundance of abused and slighted privilege—for a witness to vindicate before all worlds the justice of the sinner's

doom. Oh, spare me this pain! Do not let it be that I, who would give much to save you, should be compelled to testify against you, when no witnesses are allowed to hold their peace, though their testimony in its utterance may sever the dearest from their side.

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